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The Sea-Cat; OR, THE WITCH OF DARIEN.

A STORY OF THE SPANISH MAIN.

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AUTHOR OF "THE RED RAJAH," "DOUBLE-
DEATH," "THE ROCK RIDER," ETC.

CHAPTER I. THE GALLEON.

A TERRIBLE cyclone was raging over the Caribbean Sea, sweeping over the palm-fringed islands, tearing up trees by the roots, hurling the thatched huts of the natives to the earth

like card-houses, and scattering their remnants in the air like scraps of paper.

Ships at sea caught in that fearful hurricane had their masts torn out of them, snapped like pipe-stems, and were dashed and buffeted about by the angry waves, till their seams gaped with open wounds, and the devouring sea overwhelmed and engulfed them.

Black clouds shut out the light of the sun as with a pall of velvet, and revolved slowly in a huge circle, a hundred miles or more in diameter, around a central point, where a funnel-like opening let in a view of the calm sky above, blue, eternal, and unchangeable, in solemn contrast to the fearful tornado raging below.

Under the slowly-revolving pall of cloud howled the tempest of wind, driving in an exactly opposite direction, with such force that it cut off the tops of the waves, and reduced the

sea to a flattened mass of white foam, flying through the air in a thick mist.

Not a drop of rain fell at the outskirts of this circle. Only the fierce cyclone howled over the waters like a ravenous beast hungry for prey. But all around the silent funnel in the center a sheet of water was falling from the black clouds, while the glare of lightning and the roll of thunder never ceased. Far outside, on the outskirts of the storm, where the wind was less violent, and the waves rolled mountains high, where the ragged scud-clouds at the edge of the cyclone went flying through the air like scared sea-birds, a small vessel, made of the trunk of a single tree, slim and elegant in shape, was climbing the slopes of the billows, only to plunge madly into the trough of the sea at the opposite side, under a single, close-reefed lateen sail.



As Dona Inez uttered a faint shriek in those horrible coils, the Biscayan heaved up the boarding-ax, and fiercely attacked the terrible monster.

Many a mile away from her, but rapidly drifting nearer, was a tall and stately ship, with lofty fore-castle and poop, covered with carving and gilding, an image of the Madonna at the prow, and twenty guns of a side. Her peculiar build and rig, the enormous size of her yards, with close-reefed sails below, announced her to be a Spanish galleon of the largest size, while the course she was steering proclaimed her to be homeward bound, in all probability with treasures for Spain, for it was in the year of grace 1664, and the Spaniards ruled all Peru and Mexico.

The galleon, which bore the name NUESTRA SENORA DEL ASUNCION on her stern, did not seem to have suffered much in the hurricane, chiefly because she had avoided its full force by keeping on the outskirts, owing to the skill of a passenger on board, and not to any seamanship of the commander.

That commander, a white-haired cavalier of very distinguished appearance, was none other than Don Alonzo del Campo y Espinosa, late Governor of Cartagena de las Indias, now going home with his daughter, Dona Inez, to Spain.

The old Governor paced the poop, watching the breaking storm, for every minute drove it further and further away, and the galleon, as she got further and further from the center, began to spread her wings once more, and travel on her homeward voyage.

To the north-east, on the larboard bow, two needle-like peaks rose out of the sea, the well-known Pitons of St. Lucia, and toward these the galleon was steering her course.

Don Alonzo looked worn and anxious, for the storm had tried the vessel severely, and they were not out of danger yet.

The demons of the storm might have been cheated of their prey, but other demons remained no less dreaded by the Spaniards, and especially by those sailing in treasure-ships—the buccaneers.

The time was the royal time for the sea rovers, whose audacity in those days approached the sublime, and who were paying back to the Spaniards, at the hands of English and French alike, the robberies and cruelties by which they had become masters of New Spain and Peru.

As Don Alonzo watched the seas for a sail, now and then saying a word to his daughter, Inez, a man ascended the ladder from the waist, and stood upon the after-castle, or poop. This man was the same passenger whose seamanship had saved the galleon from being caught into the whirl of the tornado, and he was so different in looks from the stately Governor and his beautiful daughter, that he merits description, for he was a remarkable person.

He was a head shorter than Espinosa, very spare and lean, but with immensely broad shoulders. His square, bull-dog jaw and saturnine face, were decidedly Celtic, his curling hair, contrary to the fashion, was cut somewhat short, and his mustache was thin and long, waxed in the military mode, but unrelieved by a chin tuft. Despite the decidedly un-Spanish style of his countenance, he was dressed in the Spanish style, with richly embossed armor, and gold-brodered velvets and satins, and he spoke the language with such a pure accent that an old Castilian might have claimed brotherhood with him.

"And so you think there is no further danger of our meeting with those accursed devils of buccaneers, Don Enrique?" said the Governor, as he paced to and fro on the poop, scanning the horizon at every turn.

Inez was seated on the carved seat above the stern gallery, working quietly at an embroidered altar-cloth. She raised her soft eyes to the keen orbs of Don Enrique, and shuddered as she said:

"Oh! Holy Virgin, protect us! I hope so, Señor Morganos."

Don Enrique Morganos had been furtively watching the beautiful devotee, and started slightly as she spoke. His dark face flushed a little as he said:

"No pirate, be he ever so bloody, would dare to harm you, senorita."

"I would rather trust to our good pieces of eighteen for protection than the beauty of an angel," said the old Governor, a little sarcastically. "These rovers, the scum of every land, are none too good to rob a church; and sacrilegious persons such as that, would show no mercy even to an angel."

Don Enrique smiled faintly as he answered: "You are hard on the buccaneers, Don Alonzo. Your worship doubtless remembers that they were once what their name implies, men who lived by the chase, and dried their *boucan* for sale to passing ships. But the Spanish galleons,

and captains with roving commissions, robbed them of all their goods, and turned them out to starve. Who can blame them for revenging themselves?"

Don Alonzo flushed angrily to the roots of his white hair.

"Who says they had any right here, señor? Did not his Holiness the Pope give all this continent and the circumjacent islands in perpetual possession to his Most Catholic Majesty of Spain? and what right had these dogs of hunters, English, French, or what you will, to trespass on our preserves? One would think you were one of them, Señor Morganos, instead of a loyal gentleman of Biscay, to hear you plead for them."

Morganos only smiled in answer. He allowed the hot-headed old soldier to cool down before he said:

"I only stated the other side of the case, señor. The buccaneers, at least the English portion of them, are heretics, and care not for his Holiness. I do not justify them. If any such as they were to come in my way, 'tis but a short shrift I would give them."

"No shorter than I," returned Espinosa, angrily. "I would they would try conclusions with me now, in open sea, with a good ship under my feet. But that is not their game. They always select some coward to plunder."

Don Enrique turned away and looked over the quarter of the galleon over the blue waters of the Caribbean Sea. A little white speck was just becoming visible there, as yet quite unnoticed from the ship. He turned back to the old Spaniard, with his peculiar sardonic smile.

"Perhaps not," he said. "Yonder's a sail in chase of us, and from the lift of her topsails I should judge her to be one of the buccaneers."

Don Alonzo started and gazed eagerly astern. The strange sail was coming from the north-west, the direction of Jamaica, and pursuing a course that promised to cut them off before they reached St. Lucia.

And even at that distance it became plain that the stranger was a fast sailer, able to overhaul the galleon.

CHAPTER II.

THE ROVERS.

"'Tis a buccaneer, beyond a doubt," said the old Spaniard, half to himself, when he had watched the distant vessel for some time in silence. "She is but a small vessel, Don Enrique. We need not fear her."

Don Enrique cast a glance over the decks of the galleon, where the Spanish sailors were clustered in knots about the vessel, playing cards or busying themselves at little tasks, unconscious of their approaching foes, ere he answered:

"Perhaps not. These pirates fight well, however. Supposing yonder vessel should be one of Lollonois's cruisers?"

The old Governor's face underwent a change. Lollonois was the most universally dreaded of all the pirates of the Caribbean, from the pitiless warfare which he waged against the Spaniards, and the desperate ferocity of his assaults. But as Don Alonzo surveyed his gallant and well-ordered ship, his courage rose into indignation at the momentary tremor.

"Let it be Lollonois himself, with all his crew of demons: he shall not escape me, if he once attack me, señor," he said. "Ho! at the masthead, there! Where are your eyes, that you can not see the ship on the larboard quarter?"

The man who was stationed in the little battlemented hutch at the masthead, known as the "Crow's Nest," looked over the side at his commander, in some trepidation.

"The sun was in my eyes, señor, as I looked ahead," he answered; "but I see her now. 'Tis a vessel with two masts, canoe-rigged."

"A pirate, beyond a doubt," muttered Don Enrique to himself, in English. "'Twould be a strange thing were she to—no, she shall not."

He turned away to the larboard quarter, and looked earnestly at the stranger, while Don Alonzo's powerful voice echoed from the summit of the after-castle, crying:

"All hands on deck! A pirate is coming down upon us! Mariners to the ropes, and soldiers to the guns! By the blessing of Heaven we will sink the accursed wretches in the bottom of the sea!"

At the sound of the commander's voice, the sailors started up from their various occupations, with vast noise and clamor, and a number of men came pouring up the hatches from below. There were mariners, in their red caps and shorts kilts, to work the vessel, and a crowd of soldiers to do the fighting, as was the usual

custom in those days. The bright helmets and cuirasses of these latter gave the vessel a formidable appearance, as they clustered around the guns in the waist, and manned the lofty fore-castle with its battery of light guns.

Don Enrique Morganos seemed to be entirely unconscious of what was going on, as he looked at the white sails of the fast approaching stranger. He was buried in some somber reverie, from which he was suddenly awakened by a light touch on his arm. He started, and looked round to meet the pleasing dark eyes of Dona Inez. The girl exhibited none of the ordinary tremors of her sex at the approach of battle. She rather seemed some softly sorrowing angel, who grieved at the perils of others.

"Señor Morganos," she said in a low tone, "is yonder vessel a pirate?"

"I think so. I am sure of it," responded Morganos, gravely.

"Can we not escape without slaughter?" she asked, suddenly.

"I fear not, senorita."

"Think, señor. You told us once that you had been a captive to these buccaneers, and knew all their secret ways. Can you not devise some means of escape for us?"

"If I do," said the other, looking her full in the face, "what good will it bring me, senorita?"

"If the blessing of a daughter for helping her father be of good, I will bless and love you for it, señor," said Inez, warmly.

"Will you love me for it?" he asked, abruptly. She blushed deeply, as she answered:

"As much as a Christian maiden may, that hopes to be the spouse of our Lord. Remember, I am vowed to the church, señor."

"Your father says not so, Dona Inez."

"My father will consent in good time, Don Enrique. But you do not answer my question. Can you not think of a way to escape the sin of slaying yonder wicked men in their sins?"

"I can, if you will promise to love me for it. Not without," he said, obstinately, and his keen eyes glittered strangely.

"Then do it," said Inez, impetuously; and she shrunk away, red as fire, when she saw the triumphant glitter in the eyes of the strange Biscayan, whose manner had puzzled her during all the voyage from Chagres. Don Enrique had come aboard there, with letters from the Viceroy of Mexico, and had prayed a passage to the island of St. Lucia, where the Asuncion was to touch on her voyage to Cadiz. He had become a great favorite of Don Alonzo, on account of his evident experience in warfare; and his presence on board seemed to have acted as a charm against the buccaneers, for they had seen none till that day, when almost out of their range.

"I will do it," he said now, in a low tone, to Inez, with a look of great meaning. "But, mark my words, senorita, I will have my reward."

He turned away as he spoke, with a careless glance at the strange vessel, now plainly in sight, and descended the ladder that led to the waist, whence he entered the cabin below the after-castle.

Inez del Campo calmly returned to her seat over the stern gallery, and watched the maneuvers of the two vessels, with an interest that was gradually quickening into excitement, despite her usual calmness.

The strange vessel was, compared to the Asuncion, a mere pigmy in point of size, and not even fully decked, as they could see. She was one of those nondescript craft, originally invented by the Indians of the islands, larger than a canoe, but made in the same way, out of the trunk of a single tree, one of the giants of the tropics. These huge canoes were called *periquas*, and frequently measured a hundred feet in length, by ten across, being hewn into models of great beauty and swiftness, and hollowed out so as to contain forty or fifty men. It was a periqua, with prow like a knife and two huge lateen sails, that was coming skimming along close hauled to the wind, sailing three feet to one of the galleon's, and aiming to intercept her on her voyage to St. Lucia.

It may be said, why should the Spaniards fear so contemptible an adversary? The reason was that under just such ridiculous disparities of force had the buccaneers acquired their name of terror, and the instances of large galleons being taken by just such periquas, by the force of ferocious bravery at close quarters, were frequent and well remembered. Brave as was Don Alonzo, he did not covet the task of fighting even this one pirate, seeing the demoralizing fear that was already creeping over his crew at the approach of the much dreaded *fili bustieros*.

The galleon stood steadily on toward St. Lucia, the two conical Pitons being now plainly visible, even to the ravines furrowing their sides. The captain of the *Asuncion* was determined to run in between these two mountains, and fight, if necessary, in the deep land-locked bay that lies between them, in sight of the town and forts, and in reach of help from land if possible. That a vessel of forty guns should be reduced to such a humiliating course will show to what an extent was the terror spread by the buccaneers. That the incident is by no means an exaggeration, contemporary history will vouch. The *Asuncion*, with forty guns and two hundred and fifty men, crowded all sail to escape from a *periagua* without a cannon, and probably holding sixty men at the most.

But it soon became doubtful whether she would escape her pigmy antagonist, without fighting in the open sea.

The Pitons were coming plainer and plainer into sight; and the deep bay, with the houses of Santa Lucia at its further extremity, was almost ahead, when the white foam, cast from the bow of the *periagua*, was plainly audible in their ears, and the next moment the plucky little craft shot across their forefoot, and falling off from the wind, came sweeping past with a rush like that of an angry tiger, steering so close to the galleon's weather side that a grappling-iron, caught in the fore-rigging, was not three feet from the side of the buccaneer *periagua*. A crowd of powerful bearded men, in glittering armor, and loaded with weapons, rose up as the irons were thrown, with a hoarse shout of triumph, brandishing their swords.

It must not be supposed that the crew of the galleon were idle. Several ineffectual shots had been fired at the pirate from the lee guns; but naval gunnery was then in its infancy, and the sea was too rough to make good practice at the best. The great guns were almost harmless.

In another moment it is probable that the buccaneers would have boarded the Spaniard, when a sudden interruption occurred.

Don Enrique Morganos rushed out of the cabin, sprung on a gun in the waist, and shouted to the pirates in a strange tongue.

CHAPTER III.

THE SEA-CAT.

WHAT the Biscayan said, or in what language he spoke, the crew of the *Asuncion* never knew. The effect of his words was surprising.

The rope that held the grappling-irons to the galleon was cast loose, and one of the Spaniards found no difficulty in throwing it overboard, when the two vessels parted company as suddenly and causelessly as they had met, and the *periagua*, spreading her huge lateen sails wing-and-wing, went dashing away with the speed of a racer.

Don Alonzo had hardly time to utter an exclamation of wonder, when the long, tapering lateen yard of the buccaneers passed over the weather quarter of the galleon, and was gone.

Then he saw Don Enrique leap down from the gun and enter the cabin as calmly as if nothing had happened.

"*Madre de Dios!*" exclaimed the old soldier: "what manner of man is this? How did he do it? He must be a wizard!"

He turned to his daughter, Inez, who had maintained her seat on the stern with perfect tranquillity during the imminent danger that had just passed away from them, and asked her:

"Inez, who is this man? You were speaking to him awhile ago, and you seem to know something. Who is he?"

"I can not tell, my father," she answered. "He told me that he had once been a captive to these pirates, and knew certain secrets of theirs, but how he has driven away yonder vessel, I know not. Ask him, for he comes."

And, indeed, at the same moment, the dark, saturnine face of the mysterious Morganos appeared over the top of the waist ladder, and Don Enrique entered the aftercastle as quietly as a saloon.

"Don Enrique, we owe you our lives," said the Governor, warmly. "But tell me, señor, what words of yours were powerful enough to turn away the assaults of these sea demons? What did you say?"

Morganos looked astern, where the buccaneer *periagua* was fast vanishing from view. Then he looked ahead to the towering rocks of the Grand Piton, not now a quarter of a mile off, ere he said:

"The pirates belonged to the squadron of the Admiral Mansvelt. I was once a prisoner to him, and learned certain things. What they are, I may not tell; but you may thank the

Holy Virgin I was on board to-day, to make use of those secrets to save you. Enough, señor. Are you going to tack, or will you run ashore here?"

"We will enter the harbor, if it please you," said Espinosa. "I promised you a passage thither."

He forbore to question a guest further, with the high-bred courtesy of the Spanish gentleman, though burning with curiosity.

"Put me ashore on yonder rock," said Morganos, pointing to a spit of low rocks that projected from the Grand Piton on the side away from the bay. "There is water enough for a fleet, and you need not even turn from your course."

The old Governor looked surprised at the singular whim of his passenger, for the island of St. Lucia was almost uninhabited at the time, and the further side of the mountain involved a journey of at least ten miles for one who desired to make his way overland to the city.

"Are you really in earnest, señor?" he asked, doubtfully.

"Fully," said Morganos, coolly. "I am a man of strange tastes and I love solitude."

The old soldier made no answer, and signed to the helmsman to luff closer to the wind, as the stately galleon moved steadily on over deep blue water, which was rapidly growing calmer, under the shadow of a nearly perpendicular precipice, two thousand feet in height. The sullen wash of the waves against this precipice echoed dimly in the ears of the mariners, and the wind, cast back and reflected by the wall of rock, became fitful and baffling as the galleon coasted along its base.

Presently the mountain gave a turn, and disclosed the point of rocks before them, the water still continuing as deep as ever, to all seeming. Morganos stood with folded arms, apparently buried in a gloomy reverie, as the *Asuncion* slowly forged nearer the point. Don Alonzo looked at him with ill-disguised surprise and some suspicion, for since the mysterious visit of the pirates, strange thoughts had risen in his mind concerning the other. Presently he said:

"I will go down into the waist, Don Enrique, and order out the boat for yourself and your belongings. We dare not go any closer with the ship."

The other hardly seemed to hear him, though he bowed slightly, and Espinosa descended the ladder, muttering:

"I like not this stranger. He knows too much of the pirates to be an honest Spaniard. I am right glad to be rid of him."

Morganos waited till he was alone with Inez, when he abruptly asked:

"Do you know who I am, señorita?"

"I think I do," said Inez, steadily, raising her dark eyes to his.

"You are right," he answered, without a word of excuse. "I am what you think, a buccaneer; more, yonder is one of my ships, and I meant to have plundered this vessel, when I came aboard. Your eyes have saved the galleon. Do you understand?"

Inez trembled slightly, and turned pale. Her fine feminine tact had suspected something of the kind, but the plain avowal frightened her.

"Oh, señor, can you not repent?" she said, faintly. "You cannot be all bad, or you would not have spared us."

"Hush!" he said, somewhat contemptuously. "I do not believe in your saints and idols, and your Spanish robbers deserve all they get from us. But you, Inez, are an angel, and right or wrong, I cannot harm you. Hereafter, when you hear Spaniards cursing the pirate, remember that he spared you because he loved you."

Inez blushed crimson at the speech, and looked over the stern of the galleon to hide her confusion. Though loth to confess it to herself, the bold Biscayan had won upon her, during the voyage in the *Asuncion*, more than she thought possible. The very contrast of their characters had tended to deepen the impression made on the timid convent-bred girl.

She hung her head over the stern, looking into the clear sea, and painfully conscious of the flush that dyed her very neck as the disguised buccaneer proceeded in a low, impassioned tone:

"Inez del Campo, I am a man who never yet spared one of your nation; and who has sworn vengeance on them for the injuries they have done me and my countrymen. Till I knew you, I believed them all alike, cowards and tyrants, robbers of helpless Indians, to flee before brave men. But you have changed all that with your angel face and ways. Here before God I swear,

if you will be mine, I will leave the sea and become, what I have hated, a Spaniard in truth. You love me already. Say you will wed me, and all the riches of the Indies shall be poured at your feet forever. Inez, speak. I will not force you; but if you refuse to save your countrymen, on your head be the evils that follow; for I swear that I will never more show mercy to a Spaniard."

The girl made no answer; indeed, she was hardly conscious of his words in the tumult of her emotions. But as she sat there, gazing down into the clear, dark waters, unusually transparent as they were, a strange sight slowly began to dawn on her senses, which, for the time, completely distracted her attention from the other's words. Deep down in those transparent waters she became conscious of the baleful light of a pair of eyes, green and glaring like those of a cat, but of enormous size: eyes as large as a common plate or dish, and set about two feet apart. Nothing else was visible in the dark waters but those fearful eyes, and yet there was a nameless hungry horror in their aspect, which froze the blood in spite of the vagueness of the peril. Involuntarily she rose with a shudder, and exclaimed, as she lunged to him:

"Oh, Morganos, Morganos, if you love me, save me from that fearful monster."

The Biscayan started at the words, and advanced hastily to the side of the ship. No sooner had he looked over, than he, too, shuddered, in spite of all his courage.

The baleful green eyes were close to the surface, and the form of the monster to which they belonged was plainly visible.

And what a form!

Fancy a rounded, shapeless body, like that of a toad, but twice as large as a common hog-head, with long, snaky arms twining and writhing about under the water, as long as the galleon herself, and inexpressibly loathsome in appearance!

Only one look did the Biscayan give, and then he sprang to the mizzen-mast, where a sheaf of weapons hung, and seized a ponderous boarding-ax, shouting, in stentorian tones:

"*CUIDADO EL GATO DEL MAR!*" (*Ware the sea-cat!*)

That name produced a fearful commotion in the vessel. Shouts of warning and yells of terror arose on all sides, while the crew rushed to the masts for axes.

It needed no explanation to tell them of the fearful enemy that was about to assail them. They had heard of it before, in the superstitious yarns of brother-sailors, and one or two of the crew had seen the monster before. Many, paralyzed with fear, sunk on their knees, and prayed to the Madonna to save them, too cowardly to make an effort to save themselves.

And Dona Inez, half dead with terror herself, when she saw the effect produced even on the daring Morganos, stood in the midst of the after-castle, close to the taffrail, gazing down, as if fascinated, on the horrible nightmare called the *sea-cat*.

Except for the green, fiery eyes there was no likeness to a cat. A spider as large as an elephant, with exaggerated snaky limbs, was more like the monster; but the green, hungry eyes were still fixed on the girl's, their object since first she leaned over the side, and attracted its attention. She could see the whole of the loathsome terror plainly, and yet was unable to move back. The shouts of sailors and soldiers sounded in her ears like a noise in a dream, and she slowly moved toward the taffrail, like a bird charmed by the serpent.

Then, all of a sudden, the lately-quiescent nightmare woke to life. One of the long, snaky arms writhed up from the sea, as thick as a ship's cable, darted over the bulwarks, and entwined the hapless girl in its fearful coils. Seven more of the loathsome, writhing weapons came streaming up at various places in the galleon, and the confusion became fearful, while the *sea-cat* raised its body half out of the water by the force of those arms, revealing a broad mouth in its belly, garnished with tusks, the incarnation of devilish, though blind, voracity.

As Dona Inez uttered a faint shriek in those horrible coils, the Biscayan heaved up the boarding-ax, and fiercely attacked the terrible monster.

CHAPTER IV.

A TERRIBLE CONTEST.

ALREADY the form of poor Inez was dragged almost to the taffrail by the irresistible strength of the monster, when the Biscayan assailed it with the keen and ponderous ax. Morganos

was a man of vast strength, and the first blow of the ax crashed through the hard scales and cartilages that formed the arms of the sea-cat, nearly dividing the horrible weapon. Had the blow come with less force and skill, it would have been useless, for the arms of the creature were by no means the soft, slimy things they seemed.

Every one of our readers, probably, has seen, in the cages of canary birds, the oval masses of hard, white bone or cartilage, that form the joints of that smaller species of the same animal, common on our southern coasts, under the name of the cuttle-fish or devil-fish. Such will grow to the size of a small keg, with arms from six to nine feet in length, and from these come the joints in use in cages. But in the tropics, where nature luxuriates in giants, vegetable and animal, the monster, under the name of the "sea-cat," has been known to attain the full dimensions recorded in our story, and incidents such as we now relate have occurred in very truth. But for a merciful provision of nature they would be more common; but the Ruler of all has curtailed the destructive powers of the monster by denying to it the power of locomotion. Save for the means of rising and sinking in the water, the sea-cat is compelled to rely on currents of the sea to transport it in search of food; and thus its voracious maw is ever unsatisfied, and the avidity with which it seizes on a prey is always the terrible longing of semi-starvation.

Now it had risen to the surface from the bottom of the sea, where it had been lying in wait for prey like a cat, attracted by the appearance of the galleon, which it took for a living creature, and especially by the sight of Dona Inez looking over the taffrail.

At the first blow of the ax, the long feeler, at the end of the arm which encircled the girl, thrashed madly and blindly about, while hundreds of little mouths opened in the under surface of the deadly coils and began to tear and suck at the poor victim's flesh.

The Biscayan, fearless of the flying weapon that thrashed about the quarter-deck, leaved up the ax again, with a muttered curse of desperation, and dealt a second blow at the same place.

The blow was effectual, for it divided the writhing, snake-like arm, and a flood of dark, horrible blood spouted from the wound over the white deck. The coils around the Spanish maiden relaxed and fell nerveless from her, when Morganos snatched her away to the other side of the deck, and laid her senseless by one of the guns, out of sight of the glaring eyes of the terrible sea-cat.

And he was only just in time to do it; for the rest of the huge arm, where it was not cut off, kept feeling and gliding about, as if nothing had happened, reaching further and further at every writhe. Meanwhile, in the waist of the ship, matters were at a terrible pass. When Morganos looked down from the lofty aftercastle, the sight caused even his iron nerves to shudder a moment.

Those writhing arms, eight in number altogether, were twining, twisting and lashing about on the decks among the crew. Two of them, each with a shrieking, struggling victim encoiled, rose up in the air as he looked, and were recurved over the side toward those terrible jaws, only to return, empty, for more victims. The braver portion of the crew were hacking at the scaly arms with axes, and had already succeeded in severing two, but the result appeared not to inconvenience the sea-cat to any extent.

Like all animals of the low organization of the radiates, the sea-cat seems to be insensible to pain, and unharmed unless attacked at the center of the system.

And the center of that mass of writhing hideousness was slowly but surely lifting itself up the side of the galleon, by the strength of its mighty arms, so that the glaring eyes might be able to see the prey those mighty arms were now blindly seeking for.

Then it was that the dauntless buccaneer suddenly leaped from the aftercastle, ax in hand, and flung himself into the *melee* below, fearless of the monster.

Two fierce blows, and one of the arms was divided close to the bulwark, while Morganos pressed close to the stump, streaming black blood as it was, knowing that there was the only place of comparative safety. The deck was strewn with weapons, dropped from the hands of victims; five men had already been snatched overboard to a fearful doom; the rest, paralyzed with terror at the apparent uselessness of their efforts, had sunk on their knees to pray for

mercy, when the loud shout of the Biscayan roused them anew.

"For shame, cowards! If ye must die, die fighting! Boarding-pikes here! The sea-cat will be aboard in a minute! *Stab him in the eyes, when you see them!*"

As he spoke, one of the long arms wrapped itself round the mainmast, and grew rigid as a column of iron, while it became evident that the terrible body was rising up from the sea.

"Pikes! pikes!" yelled the Biscayan, and at the word, the men gathered fresh courage, and ran to him with weapons. He dropped the ax, and seized a long pike, just as the black, rounded mass of the creature's head rose over the bulwarks. The remaining arms, four in number, were all attached to various parts of the ship, and straining violently to raise the body, so that a moment's respite from death was afforded the cowardly Spaniards. They clustered behind the bold Biscayan like sheep behind their leader, holding their pikes with trembling hands.

Then, with a sudden slippery surge, the great black pulpy mass of the monster's body flopped over the rail, with huge glaring eyes standing far out of its head, a gaping maw below, and came down with a heavy squelch on the deck!

In the same instant, all of the mighty arms detached their hold, like lightning, and darted writhing among the crew.

For now the sea-cat could see its prey.

But if its means of offense were thus intensified, its defense was at the same time weakened. The one vulnerable point, the eye, was within reach; and deep into that eye the buccaneer drove the long pike, while fifty similar weapons, plunged with the energy of despair into the same vulnerable place, and into the soft pulpy belly of the fearful monster, transfixed it in a moment to the blood-stained deck of the galleon.

The sea-cat quivered all over; and its mighty arms, no longer sentient, coiling weapons, obedient to the will, shook and thrashed blindly about, till they slowly stiffened in death.

Even in death, their wild blows struck down several sailors and soldiers, and swelled the ghastly roll of slaughter. But it was only the expiring effort of the creature. In a few minutes it had ceased to quiver, and lay still and stiff, the black blood welling over the deck in streams, while the triumphant Biscayan turned coolly away, and accosted Don Alonzo as if nothing had happened, saying:

"Senor Espinosa, now we will hoist out the boat, if you please. The sea-cat never hunts in couples."

CHAPTER V.

THE BUCCANEERS' RENDEZVOUS.

FIVE years have rolled their round away, and the scene changes to the edge of the tropic forests of Darien. The perpendicular stems of enormous trees towered aloft on every side, with a maze of tangled lianas stretching from bush to bush overhead, and well-nigh shutting out the intense glare of the tropic sun, so that all beneath was a delicious bower of cool verdure. The ground had been cleared of all the luxuriant vegetation below by the hand of man, and the flowers were blooming fifty feet overhead, every vine loaded with its own separate species, while the wild jasmine, tuberose, and night-blooming cereus covered the trunks of many an old tree.

At the edge of this forest, in a partial clearing, which opened on a green savanna to the north, a group of men were gathered around the form of a woman, who appeared to hold sway over them, from the deference which they paid to her.

The men were Indians, armed with bows, arrows, and spears; the woman was to all seeming of white blood, although completely Indianized in costume and surroundings. Her form had all the delicate symmetry peculiar to the Caucasian race, when untrammelled and undeformed by fashion, and her large liquid brown eyes and curling hair, as well as the pale tint of her skin, sufficiently marked the superiority of her race over that of the coarse-haired copper-hued Indians around her.

Her dress, what there was of it, was of the most costly materials, a crown or diadem of gold, set with rough emeralds of great size, and a short skirt reaching to the knees, made of strings of gold beads in the form of a long heavy fringe, which, by its weight, always adjusted itself to the movements of the wearer. The rest of her body and limbs, graceful and rounded as those of a Greek statue, were unincumbered with clothing, and yet, from the force of purity and chastity in the face of the

girl, seemed as proper and decent as if robed in a nun's habit. The diadem on her head was crowned with white plumes, and she bore in her hand a slender spear made of solid gold, which seemed to be her ensign of royalty.

The Indian Queen looked across the open savanna, on the further side of which lay the open sea, and watched, with an eager gaze, the sails of a vessel that was standing toward the shore.

The presence of several other vessels, lying at anchor in the mouth of a river to the right, announced the presence of white men, in probably familiar intercourse with the Indians of Darien.

"The king of the strangers approaches, Chepo, I know his ship. 'Tis larger than all the rest," said the queen, to a grizzled old Indian. "Run back; hasten to rouse the tribe to receive and welcome him."

The old Indian bowed his face to the earth, and then turned away and hastened into the depths of the forest, when the queen continued:

"And you, Natato, go and prepare the palace in the air, with a feast such as the strange king loves; and I, Lola, Queen of Darien, will go among the strangers to meet him."

"Great queen, said one of the Indians, respectfully, 'tis not safe for you to go among the white devils alone. Remember how fierce and rude they are, and how they have treated the maidens who have ventured among them."

Queen Lola smiled disdainfully.

"Did I not say the white king was coming, and am I not a child of the sun as he is? Let them harm me if they dare, and the king will punish them."

"But we can not be certain that yonder vessel holds their king," persisted Natato. "These strangers seem to be at war with the other white devils, who have robbed us of our country, but they are devils themselves."

"Fool," said Lola, in a tone of vexation, "am not I the daughter of the sun, and Queen of Darien, and have I not asked the gods when the stranger should come that should deliver us from the power of the Spaniards? 'Twas the gods that promised us a deliverer: and yonder he comes as they promised. Follow me, and fear naught; the good gods themselves protect Lola, daughter of the sun and the sea."

As she spoke she moved forward with stately grace, and the submissive Indians followed her in silence, but full of apprehensions, to a spot on the sea-shore, where the savanna grass came down nearly to high-water mark, whence the sound of boisterous merriment proceeded.

There, scattered in groups around a huge fire, at which a hog was roasting whole, sat, lay, or stood, a number of bearded men, rough and fierce in expression, but all dressed with a singular mixture of magnificence and neglect. All wore armor or buff coats, in either case richly worked in gold and silver. Some were crowned with gayly plumed beavers, others with morions of steel in the fashion of a previous century, or caps of leather, iron-bound, such as were introduced by Cromwell. Velvets, satin, and laces abounded in their dress, with boots of red or yellow morocco; but most of these were defiled with grease, and with sleeping on the ground, while laces were tattered, boots in holes, and feathers battered, some more, some less.

But the weapons of the party—and all were armed with sword, pistol, musketoon, or halberd—were in splendid condition, of the most gorgeous character in ornament, and ready for immediate use.

Such as they were, these jolly ruffians were drinking from a cask of wine that stood on the sand, with the head knocked out, and all were alternately eying the roasting pig and the approaching vessel while conversing.

"The admiral will be right glad when he hears of our success," said a black-browed ruffian, in broken French-English, "for 'tis not every day that such a fort is taken by assault; and the Spanish dogs fought well, we must admit."

"Ay, ay, Lenoir; but that was only because they had no hole to creep to," responded a flaxen-headed giant, whose accent bespoke him as English. "Had the castle had a wood in the rear, they would have fled long ere they did. Well, well, after all, there was not much plunder got, and the men fell like rotten sheep in taking it. Porto Bello was something like a sack. Wine and women and gold in plenty. But here was naught but a heap of ashes, and plenty of wounds to get for one's share."

Boom! went a gun from one of the anchored ships, and in a moment more it was taken up by the rest in turn, as they thundered out a salute to their approaching comrade; and the in-

coming ship sent forth gun for gun in answer.

"Up, lads, and carry the admiral up the hill to the castle," cried Lenoir. "Give him a regular buccaneer welcome, and we'll have a jolly carouse to-night!"

At the word all the buccaneers scrambled to their feet, and hastened down to the harbor, where the strange vessel was just dropping her anchor, and across whose waters a large canoe, decorated with costly hangings for an awning, was paddling to shore, urged by a dozen buccaneers. In the high curving prow stood a glittering figure, in cuirass and helmet of steel, with black and scarlet dress, covered with gold, and shaded by a long white cloak.

"The admiral! The admiral! Long live Morgan, the King of the Buccaneers," roared the crowd, as the canoe approached the shore, and as the buccaneer admiral landed, he was surrounded by a crowd of his enthusiastic followers, who caught him on their shoulders in triumph, and carried him up a hillock that sloped down to the river's mouth, on whose summit could be discerned the still smoking ruins of the once formidable castle of Chagres.

For at Chagres it was, then only a castle with its garrison, that the greatest and most famous expedition of the buccaneers was now assembled; and it was the chief of all the freebooters of the Spanish Main, who well deserved the title of "King of the Buccaneers," Morgan himself, who now approached the rendezvous of his comrades, preparatory to his great expedition against Panama. The buccaneers already arrived had stormed Chagres the day before, and Morgan, who had been collecting succor for his friends at Jamaica and elsewhere, was but just come to join them.

Up the hill and amid the ruins they carried him, shouting and singing, all talking together and telling of the incidents of the fight; while the chief, silent and somewhat saturnine as usual, quietly listened to all the stories, without changing a muscle of his countenance. At last he opened his own lips a moment, only to say:

"Hold your prate. This was naught but the beginning. The riches will come when Panama shall be taken. To-night be merry. To-morrow we start on our journey. Set me down."

Their noisy enthusiasm subsided in a moment under his quiet and somewhat contemptuous manner. The wily chief well knew the secret of keeping his men at a distance and in awe. At a sign he was placed on his feet, and waved them away. Then he was about to give some orders, when he suddenly started, became pale, and fixed his eyes on an object without the group, ejaculating:

"Dona Inez! No, it cannot be! Who in God's name are you?"

And the buccaneers became suddenly aware that Queen Lola had come nigh to them, unseen, and stood looking at Morgan.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GOVERNOR'S SON-IN-LAW.

In a lofty and magnificently-fitted apartment in the city of Panama stood Don Alonzo del Compo y Espinosa, talking to a very gorgeously-appareled military gentleman, whose person was about as handsome as could be found, while his regular face, adorned with magnificent mustache and beard, would have been pleasing for its beauty, but for the air of conceit and intolerable arrogance affected by so many handsome men, especially Spaniards.

Don Alonzo looked a little older than when we saw him first, but his eye was still bright, and his step firm.

"Tell me, captain, what you have discovered about the pirates and their intentions," said the Governor. "Have you ordered out the scouts I told you, and have they reported?"

"They have come in this morning, not an hour ago," said the captain, in a tone of importance. "Luis Mendoza has not been a soldier for naught, your excellency. The whole of the track from here to Chagres is full of our friendly Indians, who will trot backward and forward with news as the foreign devils advance. As yet they have done nothing, except to attack our fort at Chagres, which, as your excellency well knows, is capable of defying all their forces."

"I know nothing out of my own sight, Don Luis," said the Governor, gravely. "One would have thought Porto Bello impregnable, save to artillery and regular assaults, and yet the pirates took it, with only four hundred men, against a garrison of five hundred."*

"I was not there, your excellency," said Don Luis Mendoza, with an air of ineffable importance. "And your excellency was not there either," he added, as if to detract from his own arrogance. "Had we been—who knows, Don Alonzo—we might have captured the devil Morgan and all his fellow devils."

"Killed them, perhaps, never taken them, Luis," said Espinosa. "You have never seen these pirates, or you would not talk so. I have been in a ship of forty guns when a canoe, with some fifty of these desperate men attacked us; and by heavens, Luis, I fear they would have taken us but for an accident. I never yet saw men so totally devoid of fear. I am no coward myself, but I freely confess, they caused me to tremble when I saw the effect of their presence on the crew of my galleon. They became like dying men for fear; and think of it, Luis, *Inez was on deck* when they tried to board us."

"Would I had been there, too!" said Don Luis. "I would have scattered the dogs of heretics! But what saved your excellency?"

"A passenger, whom I have since discovered to be none other than the redoubted Morgan himself, though he was then in disguise."

"*Por Dios!*" was Mendoza's only remark.

"Ay, Luis. He ordered off the pirates; and we were saved, only to fall into a fresh peril, from which, too, he saved us by his skill and daring. We were attacked by the monstrous cuttlefish they call the sea-cat, and he it was who cut in sunder the monster's arms, and finally slew it. He went ashore at St. Lucia as mysteriously as he came aboard, and we never saw him again."

"And how did your excellency find out that it was the pirate?"

"Inez told me, long afterward. She had found him out by his name, which he had hardly disguised. It was not so well known then as since."

Don Luis started, and a frown contracted his handsome face.

"And she never told me all this," he muttered.

His cogitations, of whatever nature, were interrupted by the entrance of Dona Inez herself, modest and beautiful as ever, but no longer wearing the semi-conventual dress of yore. Inez del Campo, in obedience to her father's will, and without a feeling of love, had married Don Luis Mendoza, captain of her father's guards, and heir to a dukedom, a year before. She had been taught filial obedience as her first duty, and had none of our modern romantic thoughts about love. Obedient, gentle and good, she had yet lived almost apart from her husband since their marriage, he, on his part, acquiescing in an arrangement that left him free to pursue his gallantries elsewhere.

But, indifferent as was Don Luis, he would have been no Spaniard had he not been jealous as fire. The mere notion of his wife having a secret from him angered him. It was in a tone of annoyance, with a flashing eye, that he addressed her now.

"So, madam, your ladyship did not see fit to tell me that you had secrets with the pirates."

Dona Inez looked at him, amazedly.

"What secrets? What do you mean, señor?"

"I mean—" he began, but Don Alonzo interrupted him.

"Stop, stop; you forget whom you speak to, and in whose presence," he said, gravely. "Don Luis Mendoza, this lady is a Governor's daughter, and, as such, merits to be addressed as befits her station."

"She is my wife, your excellency—" began Mendoza, angrily.

"And I am your superior officer, señor," said Espinosa, sternly; "and this lady is my daughter and heiress. Do you understand? When you speak in my presence, remember the tone of voice."

Don Luis looked sullen, but made no answer. Inez, in a gentle tone of voice, addressed him, herself:

"Nay, Luis, be not angry with me without cause. I would have told you all long ago had you but asked me. But, indeed, the remembrance of that terrible day, wherein I underwent such peril, is so painful to recall, that I have striven to forget it. Think of it, Luis! I was encircled by the slimy grasp of that odious monster, and in another moment should have been snatched overboard, when he saved me. Could I betray him to inevitable death when he had saved my life? He confessed to me who he was, and threw himself on my mercy—"

"And you spared him," said Mendoza, sarcastically. "I suppose he was a handsome cavalier?"

"Far from it," interrupted her father. "He

was a short, square man, with no beauty of face or person to recommend him; nothing but his wonderful strength and courage. Come, Luis, be reasonable. You have no cause for jealousy, I assure you. I have lost one child already in the bowels of the sea. Let me see the other happy with the husband I have chosen for her. Remember, that your future fortunes will depend on your behavior to her. The duke, your father, is not rich, and *I have not made my will yet.*"

He spoke the last words with great meaning, and left the room as he said them. Don Luis remained biting his lip, something like a sulky schoolboy.

"What did the Governor mean by losing a child?" he asked, presently, in a more pacific tone. "I thought you were his only child, but it seems I know nothing of the secrets of your family."

"I am his only child now, alas that it should be so," said Dona Inez, sadly. "But did you not ever hear that my mother was drowned when I was only three years old, and that my only sister was lost with her?"

"No," said Mendoza, in a tone of curiosity, "how was it?"

"She was coming over to join my father, who was then Governor of Carthagena. I was left behind, in the convent of Madrid, to be educated there, but my mother took with her the little Pepita, a babe at the breast. The ship departed from Cadiz, and was never heard of again; and it is only known that pieces of the wreck were found in the sea, on the coasts of Yucatan. My father still keeps poor Pepita's birthday as a day of mourning. Were she alive she would be eighteen, this year."

Don Luis said nothing aloud, but as he turned away to the window he muttered:

"So much the better. There are less to share Espinosa's savings."

"Poor Pepita," said Inez, sadly; "God knows how willingly I would give up all claim to my father's fortune, were it only possible that my sister were alive. But alas, she and our mother rest in peace at the bottom of the deep ocean. But tell me, Luis, what is it makes my father and you so grave to-day? There is some mysterious danger in the air and no one will tell me what it is."

"It is your gallant friends, the robbers," said Mendoza, in a sarcastic tone, "who are coming to redeem their promise of taking Panama, if they can. The pirates have attacked the castle at Chagres, and our brave soldiers have beaten them back in disgrace. My messengers brought in the news this morning."

He had hardly finished the news, when a loud murmur was heard in the streets below, which rose into cries of terror and rage, as the tumult came nearer and nearer to the Governor's palace.

Don Luis changed color, and went to the window. Below, he saw a confused crowd running rapidly toward the palace, crowding around the figure of a horseman, with bloody armor and bandaged head, who was riding slowly forward, evidently engaged in telling some story to the crowd as he went.

"More news. Pray Heaven it be not bad!" ejaculated Inez. "Oh, Luis, see the poor man! He is wounded!"

Don Luis hastily left the room and rushed down to the court, which he found full of the Governor's Guards, in their gorgeous uniforms, while Don Alonzo himself, with grave, anxious face, was standing on the palace steps, awaiting the horseman's approach.

"Tis the lieutenant of the castle at Chagres," said the Governor to Mendoza, in a low tone. "You told me they had beaten off the pirates."

"So help me all the saints, my runners told me so this morning," said Mendoza, in a frightened voice.

"Let us hear what he has to say," said Don Alonzo, sternly. "I have trusted you too long, Luis. Now I take command."

In a moment more the horseman had crossed the court, and slowly swung himself from his horse, as with a painful effort.

"What news, Gaspar?" asked Don Alonzo, kindly. "Thou'rt wounded. Is the castle—?" he paused.

"Taken, my lord, and the garrison slaughtered without mercy," said the wounded officer, faintly. "Two days we resisted their assaults, when they came on like devils as they are. We slew hundreds, but thousands took their places. At last they set fire to the palisades with flaming arrows, and the thatch of the barracks caught the blaze. Then, while we were extinguishing the flames, the buccaneers shot us down, and made a general assault. After that, I only

* Historical fact.

know that I was cut down, lay for dead for hours, and woke in the night, to find the place deserted and a mass of ruins, while the pirates were carousing in triumph on the beach below. I crept away, and got into the woods, where Queen Lola's Indians helped me away, and got me a horse from a plantation on the road. The pirates have taken Chagres, and by this time, doubtless, are on the march hither, to take Panama."

"And the Indians, can they be depended on, think you?" asked the Governor, kindly. "Did they treat you well?"

"They seemed to be hesitating which side to join," answered Gaspar. "Were it not for their queen, they would have attacked the pirates in the rear when they assaulted us; but they told me that Queen Lola was well affected toward the strangers."

"Have you ever seen this queen of theirs?" asked Don Alonzo.

"No, senor. She keeps herself secluded in some mysterious bower, which the Indians told me was up in the air, among the birds. They say that she is unfriendly to us, and no one knows what manner of woman she is. One of them told me that she was the daughter of the sun and the sea, and that they found her on the sea-shore at sunrise. But she hates us, and favors the pirates. So much is certain."

Don Alonzo compressed his lips.

"Then she must be removed, or slain. As his majesty's viceroy, I have power over all these Indians. Luis, come hither."

He drew the captain of the guards aside, and gave him some orders, in a low tone of voice.

On that same evening, Don Luis Mendoza, splendidly armed and mounted, and attended by a squad of splendid cavaliers, left the city of Panama, at dusk, and took the road to Chagres. As he went, he issued certain orders to every Indian he met, and mysterious signals echoed through the forest for miles around.

And on that same evening it was, that Morgan the buccaneer first met, face to face, Queen Lola of Darien, and marveled at her likeness to Inez del Campo.

CHAPTER VII.

A BOWER IN THE AIR.

THE full moon, with a purely silver radiance, only known in the torrid zone, making every thing as light as day, shone down on the forest of Darien, three or four nights after the landing of the buccaneer chief. In the depths of the forest, by the banks of a deep, narrow stream, glittered innumerable fires, and around clustered the fierce-looking, picturesque group of buccaneers, ready for their march against Panama in the morning.

All around them the shadows of the forest were as black as jet, while the red glare of the fires, catching the trunks of distant trees, made them stand out like ghosts amid the dark background. But away from these fires, and far overhead, a scene far different was enacting, where the rays of the moon were free to penetrate the upper foliage of the trees, lighting up that mysterious region seldom penetrated by man, and usually sacred to the birds and no less agile monkeys of the tropics.

Up among the tree-tops, on a vast platform, woven together with canes and wild vines, like a huge bird's nest, was a perfect fairy bower of blossoms, every intrusive branch cut away, a thick, soft carpet of dried grass covering every inequality of the platform. The walls seemed to be made of flowers, so profusely did they bloom, and overhead looked down the round moon through a maze of blossoms.

But that was not all the light afforded to this singular bower, for, spangling the wall like stars, appeared innumerable points of green light, twinkling and changing perpetually; and these points of light, closely examined, revealed themselves as the glorious fireflies of the tropics, imprisoned for a while to do duty as lanterns. That duty they performed admirably, aiding the moon; and the remotest corners of the great bower were plainly visible.

In the midst of this fairy-like scene, reclining on heaps of flowers, was the beautiful Queen of Darien; and at her feet sat Morgan, the buccaneer, listening to her dulcet tones, while slender Indian maidens flitted here and there around them, but not a man was to be seen. Lola was speaking to the chief in the broken Spanish dialect that the Indians of Darien commonly used, and seemed to be finishing some story.

"That is all I remember, senor, but they tell me I was dressed in the clothes that the cruel Spaniards put on infants, when they found me on the sea-shore, and my people have hidden me

from the gaze of our tyrants, for fear they should claim me as one of them. Do you think I look like one of them, senor?"

"Had it not been for your likeness to a lady I once met," said Morgan, gravely, "I should not have been here, beautiful queen."

"And this lady, who was she? Did you love her?" asked Lola, simply.

"She was the daughter of a Spaniard, and I could not love her," said the buccaneer, in a strange, absent tone. "These Spaniards have committed such wrongs on me and my countrymen in the past, that I were less than man to forgive them. But for all that, Dona Inez was so pure and good that she made me do what I never did before or since."

"And what was that?"

"Spare a Spaniard," said Morgan, shortly, and he ground his teeth as if angry and ashamed of the recollection.

"Do not spare them now," said Lola, angrily, and her eyes flashed. "They have destroyed and oppressed my people long enough, making them bear their burdens, build their cities, and work as slaves for them ever since they came into our country. Oh, that I could slay them all for what they have done to my children!"

Morgan laughed carelessly.

"You are fierce, little one. What could your naked Indians do against the Spaniards, clothed in steel?"

"We could die slaying them," she answered, fiercely. "But, alas, my people have no courage. They fear and serve the Spaniards; and were it not for me, they would now be giving them news of your march, instead of guarding your outposts as they are."

"You did wisely to join us, beautiful queen," said the buccaneer. "We are the only people that can save you from the Spaniards, and as you help us, so shall you be rewarded when we have taken the city."

Lola was about to reply when a long quavering note came faintly to their ears from the far distance, and she started hastily up.

"News from my people," she said, eagerly. "The enemy are hovering round our posts."

Morgan rose on his elbow to listen. The call was repeated twice, and he too started up, when Lola motioned him down.

"The white chief shall lie still, and his Indian friends shall guard him," she said. "Not one of the white strangers shall be harmed, while Lola is Queen of Darien."

"Nay, but there is danger without," urged Morgan, "and my men are armed to encounter it. You must not risk your own person."

For all answer the Indian queen motioned him imperiously to lie down, and then, turning away, she sprung to the side of the bower, and disappeared with all the agility of one used to living among the tree-tops, while at the same moment every one of the attendants also vanished, and the buccaneer chief was left alone in the aerial bower, sixty feet from the ground.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE OUTPOSTS.

FAR away in the forests a long line of Indians, in a sort of open skirmishing order, lay on the ground, covering the track to Panama. Track there was little, save a bridle-path in the oozy soil of the forest; but narrow and overgrown as it was, the wild natives knew every turn as familiarly as if it were a high road. The Indians seemed to be in some excitement, for a movement was running back and forth along the line, and contrary to their usual practice, low voices were heard in conversation.

Outside the line, in an opening of the path, where the moonbeams penetrated through a gap in the trees, stood a party of horsemen in glittering armor, surrounded by a dense knot of Indians, with spears and shields.

The whole party, white and dark, were resting quietly opposite the line of pickets, as if awaiting some expected event. A little in advance of all was a single cavalier, on whose glittering and splendid dress the moonbeams played with fine effect.

At intervals of about a minute, one of the Indians of the line would utter a long, quavering call, which was taken up and repeated by an invisible chain of their comrades far into the forest.

"*Por Dios!*" muttered the splendid cavalier to himself, with a slight shiver; "his excellency has sent me on a nice job. These fellows seem to be faithful to their queen, and what shall we do if they fight? The English devils cannot be far off, now."

Again the long, quavering call echoed through

the forest, and this time it was answered close by, from the top of a neighboring tree.

The cavalier started.

"What the deuce!" he muttered, "who can that be?"

The instant that call sounded, ending with a peculiar intonation, every Indian fell flat on his face to the earth, including those with the party of horsemen. Then there was a slight rustle in the branches overhead, and a slender, active figure came flying through the air with a circular swing, at the end of a long, slim liana, and stood on its feet in front of the horse of Don Luis Mendoza, who sat gazing at it in blank astonishment.

It was the figure of a girl, slim and fairy-like, with skin as light as his own, and a face of marvelous beauty; the face of Lola, Queen of Darien. But when she spoke, as she did a moment after, in broken Spanish, Mendoza was even more surprised, for the voice was that of his own wife, Dona Inez.

"What wishes the senor, at the posts of Queen Lola?" asked she, proudly.

Mendoza looked at her earnestly a minute, ere he answered:

"Who are you, senora, in God's name?"

"I am Queen Lola, daughter of the sun and the sea," said the girl, proudly; "and once more I say—what would you?"

"I come from the Governor of Panama," said Mendoza, as soon as he had recovered from his surprise; "and I come to demand of Queen Lola that she place scouts on the track of the foreign devils that have landed, and keep away all provisions from them. The king of Spain is very powerful, Lola, and these wretches will assuredly be conquered. If you join with us to destroy them you shall be rewarded; but if you cling to them, you will but share their fate."

"And what reward shall be given to me and my people, if I do as you wish?" asked Lola, sarcastically.

"The greatest reward in the gift of the Governor," said Mendoza, "and a thousand spears to arm your warriors."

"And suppose I prefer to trust to the strangers, who promise to make us free from taxes and labors, such as you give us—what then?" she demanded scornfully.

"Then your kingdom will be taken from you, your tribes hunted down with bloodhounds, and yourself burned to death in the city of Panama," said the Spaniard, coldly.

"Fool! Knowest thou that the white sons of the sea are here, before whom your warriors faint and cry like women? They will avenge me if you touch a hair of my head. What ho! Rouse ye all, and seize me this meddler, my faithful children!"

In a moment every Indian was on his feet, and the don was the center of a crowd of threatening spears. The men who had come with him, recognizing the voice of their queen, seemed inclined to be hostile, and for a moment Mendoza was in danger.

He extricated himself from it by an appeal to the long-standing fears of his auditors, whom he well knew in the character of faithful and subservient slaves.

"Hearken, Indians of Darien," he cried; "ye know who is your king, and how the Governor of Panama is his viceroy. In the name of Don Felipe, king of Spain and all the Indies, I pronounce Queen Lola to be no longer queen, but Natato, the son of Dando, is king in her stead!"

This Natato was an Indian whom he knew to have been ill-treated by the riotous buccaneers some time before, and to be desirous of revenge. A large party of the Darien Indians were also partisans of Natato, who was one of their most famous warriors and hunters. And Natato was commander of the line of Indians that guarded the buccaneer camp.

The words he uttered produced an immediate and marked effect. The Indians, for over a hundred years, had been so much accustomed to obey the Spaniards that they felt like rebellious schoolboys, fearful even while defiant, when Lola influenced them to join the buccaneers. The making and deposing of kings by the viceroy was not unknown to them.

As a consequence the Indians hesitated, and Natato, who had always been a malcontent, turned loweringly on the queen, whom he had lately adored.

Mendoza improved the opportunity, crying: "In the name of King Philip of Spain, I command you, King Natato, to seize that rebellious girl and deliver her to me."

"Men of Darien, you hear the order! Thus I seize her!" cried Natato.

But he was not destined to do it that time.

With an active bound, Lola sprung back, glowing with indignant courage, and cried, in clear, ringing tones:

"All who wish for liberty strike down Natato and the Spaniards. I am your queen, sent by the sun-god out of the sea."

Her words were not without effect, and again the Indians on both sides wavered in their allegiance, for they had a superstitious reverence for the child found on the beach at sunrise long ago, whom they imagined to be a goddess.

But Natato, who was an old man, and remembered the circumstances of the supposed divine appearance, was also determined to keep his newly acquired royalty, if fighting for it would help him.

"She is no goddess!" he cried. "Twas but a babe of the white people drifted ashore on a float from the wreck of a great ship. Long live the king of Spain, and down with the white witch that has deceived us all for so long!"

As he spoke he bounded on Lola and seized her delicate form in his powerful grasp. The girl was quite unarmed, and as she felt the gripe of Natato, and saw the Spanish horsemen, at a signal from Mendoza, urge their horses forward in a crowd round her, her courage gave way for an instant, and she shrieked aloud.

She was but a girl, and not of that stolid Indian race after all, though educated as such, and the instinct of natural terror overcame the acquired hardihood of the Indian queen.

Natato laughed savagely and raised his spear. "She has fooled us long enough. Let us be men, and obey a warrior."

But Mendoza stayed his arm, saying:

"Call off your warriors from guarding these God-forsaken wretches. This girl is none of you. She is a Spanish maiden, and must be judged by Spanish laws. Give her to me, and bind her fast."

In a trice the obsequious Natato and his servile followers had pounced on the unfortunate queen, who was bound hand and foot and taken in front of Mendoza's saddle. Then, turning his horse on the way to Panama, the cavalier rode toward the west, followed by the newly-appointed king, who had seized and appropriated the gold diadem from poor Lola's brow, and was obeyed by the Indians as cheerfully as though it had always been there.

"So," said Mendoza to himself, as he rode off, "that is a job well done, and more than I expected. Now the Indians will be for us, firmer than ever, and 'twill puzzle these buccaneers to get food or news on the way to Panama. And if I do not much mistake me, this maiden will prove to be the daughter of his excellency, whom all thought to be drowned."

CHAPTER IX.

THE WITCH OF DARIEN.

Two days after, Don Alonzo was returning from the plains without Panama, whither he had repaired to review all the forces available for the defense of the city against the threatened invasion of the buccaneers. These were sufficiently formidable, being nearly three times as numerous as any that Morgan could hope to raise, four hundred of them being Spanish cavalry, of the centaur type that has descended to our day in the *vaqueros* of Mexico.

The old Governor's spirits were much better than usual, for his men seemed to be animated with the best courage; and all were splendidly equipped. The sound of martial music was pleasant and inspiring, as the troops defiled away into the town, and the Governor rode gently toward the dense forests on the east, to see if any news awaited him there, from his Indian allies.

All day long, runners had been coming in from the east, where a chain of scouts had been established, who reported, almost every hour, the movements of the buccaneers, thirty miles away.

He heard that they were pressing on their way through the forest, without any guides, almost devoid of food, and in great extremities. Every plantation on their way was deserted, and the Indians were shooting arrows into their camps at night, and harassing them as closely as they dared to.

He heard also that Don Luis Mendoza had succeeded in kidnapping the Queen of Darien, whom he was bringing a captive with him.

The last runner announced him as only a short distance off, and Don Alonzo was going to meet him.

As he approached the forest, the sun was sloping down to the horizon behind him; and the level beams, darting through the forest, revealed a party of horsemen coming toward

him, which he soon recognized as Don Luis and his cavalcade.

The captain of the guards was looking his best, and made a gallant appearance on his handsome black charger at the head of his men. By his side rode a muffled-up figure, with a feathered head-dress, that seemed to be the especial object of his care, for he himself held the bridle of the mule on which it was mounted.

Don Alonzo galloped up and was respectfully saluted by Mendoza, who, in a pompous tone, announced to him:

"Dona Lola, your excellency, once Queen of Darien, captive to my sword."

At the same moment he twitched aside one of the muffling folds that enveloped the face of his companion, and disclosed the withered features of an old Indian hag, with gray hair.

"She is their prophetess and queen, your excellency," he said. "I made one Natato assume the office of king, and the savages wisely submitted to the decrees of the king of Spain."

"You have done well and redeemed your fame," said Espinosa, heartily. "Does she talk our language, this prophetess of theirs?"

"Not a word," said Don Luis, hastily. "Your excellency is aware that I have learned the barbarous tongue of these savages. Whatever questions you are pleased to ask, I will put them to her."

"Ask her, then, what made her join with the enemies of Spain," said the Governor; "and if she does not deserve death for rebellion."

Don Luis spoke to the old woman in a strange language, and she opened her withered lips in a short answer.

"She says she is ready to die," said Don Luis. "T'would be well to kill her, your excellency, for she has much power among these people."

"Take her to the city, and keep her under guard in my palace," said Don Alonzo. "We will not stain our hands with unnecessary blood, when we may be assaulted at any moment. How far off are the pirates, and what is their condition, Luis?"

"They are starving to death, like the wild dogs of the forest," said the captain, contemptuously. "They are gnawing at hides of leather and digging for roots, so that they will be as weak as rats, when they come here. We shall have little trouble, save to bury them."

"What is their number?" asked Don Alonzo, without heeding the gasconade.

"Scarce twelve hundred, without artillery; half armed with pikes and halberds, and the rest with short musketoes, swords and pistols."

"Twelve hundred. I think we can give an account of them," said the Governor, thoughtfully. "Luis, you shall take command of the cavalry, and make the first attack. Now go and rest."

As he spoke, they turned, and rode toward the city. Little was said on the way, for the Governor was thoughtful and anxious; and Don Luis, after the first burst of egotism, seemed to be equally disinclined to speak. They rode silently across the fields and entered the streets of Panama, where the people welcomed them with glee, having heard of the capture of the Indian queen; and they gazed with open-mouthed curiosity at the muffled-up figure that rode beside Mendoza, as if it had been some strange wild beast.

In a short time they arrived at the palace, where they separated. Don Luis conducted his silent prisoner to an upper chamber, next to his own, and only opening into it, where he signed to her to enter, and placed a sentry over the door. Then he left the chamber, saying:

"Let not the Indian witch entice thee to speak to her, soldier. She is a heathen sorceress, who can change her face and figure to anything she pleases, when she is alone with a man, even to the face of an angel, and speak with all tongues. If she addresses thee, make the sign of the cross, and turn thy back. If she strives to leave the room, thrust her back with thy halberd."

The soldier saluted, and as his commander left the room, muttered:

"Ay, ay; all the witches of Darien cannot bewitch Blas Ortiz. 'Twould be a good service, no doubt, to slay her, as an offering to holy church."

Don Luis proceeded along the corridor to where his wife's apartments were situated, and abruptly entered.

Dona Inez, who was seated at tapestry work with her maids, started up to welcome him with quiet modesty, and affecting a pleasure she did not feel, but offering her cheek to his kiss in dutiful fashion.

Mendoza kissed her coldly, and then abruptly said:

"Send your maids away. I've something to tell you."

With a gesture she dismissed the attendants, and he continued:

"You have been a cold wife to me, Inez, but I will admit, a good one. Tell me, if I committed a secret to you, would you keep it?"

"I should do my duty, my lord, and obey you in all lawful commands," said Inez, quietly. "I have been taught so, by the good sisters."

"And if there were a strife between your father and myself, which would you go with?" he demanded, keenly.

"Nay, now, God forbid!" said Inez, with a shudder; "how is that a possible thing?"

"Suppose I ordered you to do something, and your father forbade it—would you obey him or me?"

"Nay, my lord, my father would not countermand your orders," she said; "but if it were possible, I owe my first duty to you."

"And would you obey me even to death?" he asked, with deep meaning.

"Ay, cheerfully, my lord," said Inez, with a gentle sigh. "I would meet death itself, anything but dishonor, to save you from harm."

"Do you say that from love or duty?" he asked, again.

"From duty, my lord," she replied, frankly. "You know I have never deceived you about love, but I have tried to do my duty toward you."

Don Luis stood looking at her silently for a minute, then turned away and paced the room two or three times. When he came back, he said:

"Swear before God and all the saints that you will never reveal what I am about to say till I give you leave."

"My lord, if you have any secrets, you may be sure of my silence without swearing to it."

"Ay, but this is something even your father must not know," said Mendoza, in a low tone, and looking apprehensively around.

"Then pray keep it in your own breast," said Dona Inez, gravely. "If it is not for him to know, it is not for me to hear."

"Bah, foolish girl!" he snapped out, fiercely; "'tis nothing wrong. But, if you will not keep your husband's secrets, let it go. There is news that is no secret. Morgan and his pirates will be in sight of Panama to-night unless they are all dead men. How like you that?"

Dona Inez turned pale and trembled.

"Oh, heavens!" she murmured, "what will become of us if they take the place?"

"Easy enough told, my lady. The fate will not be pleasant. But the place is not taken yet. If it is, I have a galleon loaded and ready in the port to which we shall fly, and where we shall be safe; for the pirates have left their boats at Chagres. But why do I say this? No doubt you will be well treated if *Don Enrique Morganos* has not forgotten you."

He said the last words with deep meaning, and looked keenly at his wife. Evidently the man was brooding over something he had heard.

What it was they never explained to each other, for at that moment the distant sound of musketry rolled toward them on the evening air, and Mendoza started, exclaiming:

"Ha, St. Jago! The pirates were closer on our heels than I thought. I must away to my duties. You would not listen to what I had to say. You may be sorry for it, my lady. Farewell, and, whatever happens, continue to be the same excessively virtuous piece of ice, or you may find Mendoza is no fool."

He left the apartment with the appearance of great irritation, and left Inez wondering at the meaning of his words.

Blas Ortiz, the sentry on duty over the witch of Darien, was pacing moodily to and fro in the fast-gathering darkness, when the door of the captive's room gently opened, and a low, sweet voice addressed him, in broken Spanish:

"*Senor soldado*, for the love of God, is the wicked captain gone?"

For all answer Ortiz presented the point of his *partizan* at the door, and sternly growled:

"Go back, old witch. I know your tricks. The captain warned me."

Some one shrunk back in the darkness, and the same sweet voice said, in a frightened tone:

"No, no, I will not try to escape, indeed; but, oh, *senor*, listen a moment. I am not what I seem, indeed."

Something in the voice was so sweet and plaintive, that, involuntarily, the rough soldier muttered:

"She has the voice of a girl, and the face of an old witch. Why is this?"

"Indeed, *senor*, you have not seen my face."

urged the sweet voice. "I wore a cunningly contrived mask, which the cruel captain forced me to assume, threatening me with worse than death if I refused. And, oh, señor, he told me that I am to be burned as a witch to-morrow."

"It's true," said Ortiz, assentingly, "and, if the priests say true, 'twill serve ye right."

"But, oh, señor, indeed I am no witch," pleaded the voice in the dark. "I am but a poor girl, I know not whom, and I only wish to speak to the Governor of Panama alone."

"It can't be done," said Ortiz, decidedly. Then he added, dubiously: "At least not that I see now, and yet—I'm sorry for you."

"See, señor," said the voice, eagerly; "I have gold with me yet. I will give you gold worth a doubloon if you will do me an errand to the Governor."

"I cannot," said Ortiz, decidedly. He paused, and again added, softly: "Till I'm off guard at least."

"And you will do it then?" said the voice, in a tone of joy. "'Tis but a little thing, only to give him this. Put out your hand."

Ortiz put out his hand, and met the soft, plump fingers of a girl. She slipped into his hand something, that his pious senses recognized at once, even in the dark, as a cross.

"Give that to him," she whispered. "What it is I know not, but the old priest of the sun-god gave it to me, and told me, if I were in any peril, to send it to the chief of the Spaniards, and 'twould save me. Will you do me this errand? You shall be well rewarded."

"I'll do what I can when I'm off guard," said Ortiz, "for you talk like a Christian, and I should like to see your face."

Before the other could answer came the rapid steps of Mendoza; and, a moment later, he stalked into the room with a lantern, only to find Ortiz pacing stolidly up and down before the closed door.

"Look close to the prisoner, Ortiz," he said, and he opened the door, and, holding up the lantern, peered in.

Ortiz, over his shoulder, beheld a wrinkled, withered old hag in the middle of the room, half-raised on her elbow from where she lay on the floor. Mendoza seemed satisfied and turned away.

"Now, for the outposts," he muttered. "To-morrow will tell the tale."

The boom of a heavy gun cut off the end of the sentence.

CHAPTER X.

THE BUCCANEER CAMP.

THE short twilight of the tropic was over, and the full moon was some five degrees or so above the horizon, when the worn and haggard-looking head of a straggling column of men emerged from the forests around Panama, and debouched on the open ground. Before them was a range of low hills, that promised to intercept the view of the city when they should go a little further, but over these hills they could see the lights of Panama, and before them was a large troop of horse, the moonbeams glittering on cuirass and helmet.

The weary and haggard men on foot were the buccaneers, who, for five days, had been struggling through the forest, nearly starved, reduced to the extremity of feeding on scraps of hides and leather.

Not one of them had tasted food for the last twenty-four hours, and yet every man broke out in a rapturous cheer as the lights of Panama came in sight.

There was the goal of their course, the prize of their sufferings, before them; and the bellowing of oxen in the vales announced that food was near.

But the food was defended by their enemies. The glittering troop of horse was trotting across the rear of a large herd of oxen, and the cries of drivers in the distance told that they were driving the oxen, as fast as might be, toward the city.

Then, with the wild, desperate ferocity of starving men, the head of the buccaneer column broke loose from all restraint, and rushed out over the plain, the men running like deer, after the flying cattle, fearless of their guardians.

The bright flashes of muskets and the rapid crackle of reports followed in succession as the wild rovers dashed forward; and the gallant-looking troop of horse scattered and fled in confusion, several saddles being emptied in the first volley.

Then there was a yell of hungry triumph as the buccaneers dashed into the midst of the cattle, stabbing and shooting till three score carcasses strewed the ground.

Little cared they for the contemptible efforts

of their enemies, and, as the rest of their comrades came running out of the woods in confused crowds, the valley was turned into a great butcher's shop, where the cooks were at work close to their meat in ten minutes from the first sight of the Spaniards.*

And then it was that a single horseman on a black steed came riding through the bivouac among the fires, and everywhere he went was followed by enthusiastic cheers, while the lately riotous groups resolved themselves into a regular order with marvelous quickness, and the camp assumed the appearance of a disciplined army.

It was the buccaneer king, whose entrance produced such an effect. His iron features were set in an expression of firm resolve, an anxious frown was on his brow, as he gave a few brief orders.

Then a chain of sentries were thrown out on the plain, with a silence and celerity that told of iron discipline, and the resting buccaneers enjoyed their first meal in quiet security, jesting and singing around their fires over the expected conflict of the morrow.

Morgan himself rode through the chain of sentries, and, passing through a gap in the encircling hills, sat on his horse, looking at the distant lights of Panama.

The buccaneer chief was gloomy and anxious. Since the strange disappearance of Queen Lola, and the withdrawal of his Indian allies, every sort of vexatious impediment had been thrown in his way. Accustomed as he had been to despise the Spaniards, he realized that an able and acute mind was now controlling their movements, and, bold as he was, he was not free from fear.

"But, by all the powers of Heaven," he muttered, fiercely shaking his hand at the distant city, "if I find ye have harmed one hair of that innocent girl's head, not one stone will I leave on another of your priest-ridden city."

As he sat there, brooding, the distant rumble of horses' hoofs at a gallop announced to him that an enemy was approaching. It could be nothing else where he was.

The buccaneer glanced round behind him, to where the line of sentries were left on guard. They were almost invisible in the darkness, for all were crouching to the earth in the hunter fashion of their original pursuit.

Then he drew from his holster a long horse-pistol, and, cocking it, awaited the approach of the enemy.

In a few minutes the dark forms of a small party of horsemen were seen approaching, and Morgan rode out into the moonlight to show himself.

The other party halted at the sight, and then a single cavalier approached him, bearing a small white flag, and demanded, courteously:

"Señor, where shall I find Don Enrique Morganos? I am Don Luis Mendoza, the Governor's son-in-law, and captain of his guards."

Morgan scanned the other from head to foot ere he answered:

"I am Morgan, admiral of the forces of the king of England, and ally of Queen Lola, of Darien.† What would you?"

CHAPTER XI.

THE WITCH'S FATE.

DON LUIS saluted the other politely:

"I come, señor, to demand, in the name of Don Alonzo del Campo y Espinosa, Governor of Panama, what is the meaning of this bold invasion of the territories of the king of Spain?"

"The meaning will be found in my commission," said Morgan. "If you require more explanation you will get it to-morrow. You have stolen away Queen Lola, of Darien. Where is she?"

"In prison, for the witch she is," said Mendoza, haughtily. "In three days she will be burned alive as a witch."

Morgan's impassive gravity never altered. The line of his mouth closed tighter, and his brows met slightly, as he said:

"I thank you, sir, for your frankness. Now, listen to my words, and remember every one, for Morgan keeps his promises. If you harm one hair of her head, I will not leave a man alive in Panama. You, yourself, captured her, Mendoza. My spies have told me that. Well, then, I hold you responsible for her. Harm her, and you shall cry out for death in vain, amid such tortures as my men only can invent. You may flee to the uttermost parts of the earth, and even there I will follow you. You cannot escape me."

* Fact.

† The principal incidents of these pages are historical.

Now go back, and tell your master what I have said."

He waved him disdainfully off with the pistol, but Don Luis, who had been using his eyes to the best advantage, had by this time made the discovery that the chief was alone and unsupported.

With the treachery of his race, he tried to avail himself of the advantage. As if convulsed with rage, he suddenly exclaimed:

"Say you so, vile pirate? Then you shall die with her. Seize him, men, and kill him if he resists!"

In an instant there was a rush of horsemen toward the chief, and his pistol exploded with a loud report. The foremost soldier threw up his arms with a yell, and fell from his saddle. But the rest still spurred on, and in a moment inclosed the buccaneer, while Don Luis, shouting, "Surrender!" struck at him with his sword.

It met the blade of Morgan, who had not even backed his horse to escape. The buccaneer chief sat like a rock, his long sword playing from side to side like a flash and parrying the desperate blows of the Spaniards with apparent ease.

When he struck back, every blow came like the kick of a horse, with a rapidity and strength that was amazing.

Don Luis, meeting one of them, lost his guard, and fell over half-stunned by a stroke that clove his steel cap like paper.

Another slash cut open a trooper's face, and a third killed a horse. Then there was a rushing and shouting close by, and a number of buccaneers came running up, opening fire as they came.

The arrival of succor disheartened the Spaniards, already demoralized by the stubborn resistance of the strong buccaneer. With one accord they fled, headed by Don Luis, who shouted, as he went:

"Dogs! We shall see to-morrow."*

And the buccaneer chief coolly wiped his blade, never stirring from his place, and observed:

"We must extend our posts, men. These fellows will try to surprise us if we do not keep a good watch. See yonder. I thought they only came to feel us."

As he spoke he pointed to the town.

The bright flash of a piece of artillery illuminated the night, followed by a dull, heavy report. Then they heard the loud hum of a shot, and the missile itself plunged into the hill-side several hundred yards off.

The buccaneers burst into a universal laugh of scorn at the ineffectual shot, and one of them remarked to his chief, in the independent fashion of their organization:

"By my faith, admiral, 'twill be easy work taking that town, if they shoot no better by daylight."

"Fear not for that," said Morgan, gravely.

"We shall have all the fight we want to-morrow ere we get to Panama. Keep good watch."

He turned round and walked his horse slowly back to the bivouac, buried in a brown study. He was thinking of the morrow.

And all night long the Spaniards continued their ineffectual cannonade, while the buccaneers slept soundly beside their fires, unmindful of the danger, and only wishing for the coming of that daylight which was to bring them all victory or death.†

Don Luis Mendoza stood on the shore of the bay of Panama, watching the trips backward and forward of a laden boat. Every time it came to shore, a pile of articles of furniture, boxes and bags was lessened by a boat-load.

Several other boats were plying backward and forward, and they all had the same destination, and bore similar loads from different parts of the sea-shore.

Their destination was a huge and stately galleon, as large as a frigate, with thirty grinning port-holes at a side, commanding the town.

In spite of threefold forces and all the aid of artillery, the Spaniards were already in dread of the next day, and were conveying away all their valuables on board the galleon, ready to flee at a moment's notice.

Don Luis was gloomily meditating on the chances of the next day, the dull pain in his head where the stunning blow of Morgan had lighted, helping to tinge his anticipations with disaster.

"By the sword of Santiago," he muttered, to himself, "who would have thought a short, un-

* Historical words.

† Historical.

oversized man like him such a giant in strength. He thrust us over like children. But he has one weakness. He loves this Lola, and I can buy him with her, if so be fortune turns against us on the morrow. 'Tis well Don Alonzo knows not who she is, so far. I shall take care he does not, till it suits my purpose."

A trample of hoofs near him, and a soldier rode up.

"The senior commandante wishes to see you, capitano," he said.

"I will be with him, immediately. Hurry with that boat there. All of this must be in the ship an hour before dawn. Now, soldier."

And the captain turned away and proceeded to the Governor's palace, in some doubt as to the cause of the summons.

He found Don Alonzo pacing up and down his room in deep thought, and was surprised at the greeting he received, so absent was it.

"Your excellency was pleased to send for me. I am here."

"Ay, Don Luis. I sent you forth to observe the motions of the enemy, and had not time till now to take your report. Have you been around the troops to-night?"

"Ay, your excellency."

"Are they ready to move in the morning?"

"They sleep on their arms in line of battle covering the city."

"And the pirates, where are they?"

"Encamped within long gunshot, your excellency. The cannonade will prevent their advancing before daylight."

"Did you see their leader?"

"I did."

And Don Luis detailed the conversation that had ensued with Morgan.

Don Alonzo frowned thoughtfully, and walked up and down for several minutes without answering. Then he said:

"This old witch must be an influential personage, for the chief pirate to be so anxious about her. Who is she, Luis?"

"She seems to be a sorceress, your excellency. As long as her voice controlled the Indians, I was in great peril, but by seizing her with force all her arts availed not. Were it not best to burn her alive, so that her arts may not cast a shadow over our people?"

The old Governor crossed himself superstitiously.

"Perhaps you are right, Luis. Since she has entered the palace I feel a kind of gloomy foreboding overcome me as to to-morrow's battle. The soldiers are full of spirit, but I know how long 'twill last, if they meet with any disaster. 'Tis the enchantments of this witch, no doubt, that depress me. She must die, and yet—"

"And yet the goodness of your excellency's heart can not bear to witness the deed. Is it not so?"

"Frankly, yes."

"Leave it to me, your excellency. I will see to it that ere morning not a charm shall be left to dismay our brave soldiers."

The Governor gave a sigh of relief.

"Do so, Luis. I can face the weapons of the English devils, and feel satisfied of victory, but Father Pedro has just left me, and he has been telling me of my duty to the church."

Don Luis smiled. Father Pedro was an old tool of his, and he knew who had sent him to bias the mind of Espinosa. As he turned away the Governor observed:

"Be ready at dawn. I have resolved what to do. I shall attack the pirates instead of waiting to receive their assault. You will lead the first charge of cavalry, and I shall follow it up with pikes and musketeers, as speedily as possible. I have directed the Indian allies to drive a herd of fierce bulls on the enemy, and with the blessing of God, we shall destroy them utterly."

"Ay, your excellency, but not if they are assisted by the magic spells of the witch of Darien."

"True, true. Therefore, Luis, take her from the city. Slay her as you will, but let me not see it."

"Fire and water are death to witches," said Mendoza, sententiously; "therefore we will drown her first, and burn the body after."

The Governor shuddered, and waved him away. The old soldier had not the callous cruelty of the young one.

"Don't talk of it," he muttered, irritably.

"Do your duty, and no more."

Don Luis bowed, and left the room.

When he was in the corridor he laughed to himself.

"I didn't think Father Pedro would frighten him so. Now I am safe, in any event."

He summoned a guard from the guard-room,

and hastened to the apartment where the mysterious witch of Darien was confined.

He found Blas Ortiz as stolid and wide-awake as ever, and relieved that gentleman from guard duty, to his great satisfaction.

Then the witch was brought out, still muffled in her rags, her withered face stony and impassive in the torchlight. Without a word of remonstrance she suffered herself to be taken away, in Don Luis's charge, and escorted to the beach. Here the captain put her in a boat, and, declining any assistance, pulled her away himself out into the bay.

He was gone half an hour.

When he came back, the boat was empty of all but himself.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BATTLE.

WITH the early dawn of morning, all the city of Panama was astir. Companies of infantry, some armed with pike, cuirass and morion, others with heavy matchlock-musket and rest, debouched out of the principal avenues of the city, and marched forth on the plain, at the heels of a heavy column of cavalry.

Don Alonzo sat on his horse, surveying the passing forces, close to a long line of cannon, planted to defend the approaches to the town.

He watched with pride the steady march of his well-equipped men, as they ranged themselves in three bodies, while the horsemen drew off to the right, and formed line of battle on the flank of the infantry.

As yet there was no sign of a movement from the buccaneers. The smoke of their fires could be seen rising on the other side of the intervening hills, announcing that they were cooking breakfast, but the solitary figure of a sentinel on the crest of the ridge, observing the Spaniards, was the only sign of life apparent otherwise.

Presently Don Luis Mendoza left his post at the head of the cavalry, and galloped up to Espinosa, gallant and handsome, saluting as he came, and inquiring:

"Is it your excellency's pleasure we advance? The pirates may be surprised by a rapid dash, and my cavalry are ready."

Don Alonzo waved his hand.

"Forward, in God's name," he said.

Then there was a sounding of trumpets and beating of drums.

With one accord the artillery opened fire at the crest of the hills, and the infantry, in two lines, pressed steadily and slowly on.

Each line was composed of eight ranks of men, musketeers in the center, and pikemen sheltering the flanks, while six ranks of horsemen pressed forward at a trot toward the hills that sheltered the buccaneers.

Espinosa's cheek flushed with excitement as he saw the movement, and the ardor of his youth seemed to return to him. Only the reflection that on his own life depended the issue of the day, restrained him from dashing forward to head the assault. But he knew that his officers were all alike unpracticed in war, and that the artillery especially required his presence.

To the management of that he devoted himself at once, and directed a far more efficacious fire than that of the night, dropping the missiles over the crest of the hill with great accuracy.

The infantry did not go far. Almost as soon as they were put in motion, a bugle sounded in the buccaneer camp, and a line of skirmishers came dashing over the crest of the ridge at a run. Then the head of a small, compact column emerged from a gap, at a slow trot, and the dauntless buccaneers bore down on the Spanish center.

The size of the body was ludicrously disproportioned to the numbers of Spaniards, but the strangers seemed to be perfectly confident, for they advanced with a shrill yell.

Not a pikeman was in that body of strangers. In the eyes of a soldier of that day it was virtually defenseless.

So thought Don Luis, as he beheld it. He waved his sword, the trumpets sounded the charge, and down went the horsemen on the buccaneer column, with a loud shout of triumph. The skirmishers ran back to the hill, and clustered in knots at the sight, but the little band in the center spread into a line fronting the cuirassiers, halted in their tracks, and quietly awaited the onset of the Spaniards.

They had not long to wait.

Confident of victory from the absence of pikes, and spurring their horses to desperate speed, Don Luis and the cuirassiers thundered down. Like a range of statues stood the buccaneers, till less than seventy yards intervened. Then down went the front rank on one knee, and up went the bright muskets. Silent and

grim as statues, something in their attitude awed the Spaniards. The headlong speed of the charge insensibly diminished, as first one, and then another began to pull at his horse, till the gallop became a canter.

Don Luis shrunk back into the ranks, which became disordered, and finally slackened into a trot, within twenty yards of the muskets.

Then, and not till then, a long, rolling volley came from the kneeling rank of the buccaneers, and a second followed from the stooping rank above them. Scores of saddles were emptied at each volley, horses plunged and kicked, and the cuirassiers became in a moment a helpless, surging mass of confusion.

A third volley, still more withering, in another second completed the rout, and then the three advanced ranks of the buccaneers fell on their faces, while the fourth, fifth and sixth ranks opened their fire.

They shot into a crowd of fugitives.

Thoroughly demoralized, the whole of the Spanish cavalry broke and galloped to the rear in wild confusion, just as the reserve of the enemy, in serried ranks of pikes, came out of the gap on the field, and the skirmishers spread out once more, and dashed ahead at a run, shouting fiercely.

Then arose a great confusion on the Spanish side, as officers galloped about on the front of the infantry, excitedly begging them to stand fast, and the bellowing of cattle began to be heard.

Out of a neighboring hollow issued a great herd of fierce bulls, driven by crowds of Indians, and came rushing over the field at full speed. Instead of charging the buccaneers, as they were expected to do, the obstinate brutes rushed in between the contending forces, right in front of the discomfited cavalry. Maddened with rage and terror, as the latter desperately spurred through, some broke to one side and ran over some Spanish infantry, others ran at the buccaneers, only to be shot down and stabbed by the veteran hunters, while the greater part swept over the artillery, bellowing loudly, and dashed into Panama.

With loud yells the whole of the buccaneers ran forward, shooting as they went. The remnant of the Spanish infantry began to fire in return, and in a few minutes a warm engagement was in progress in that part of the field.

Don Alonzo had watched the various disasters with coolness and intrepidity. When cavalry and bulls alike fled without doing any damage, he looked worried, but as the steady lines of the Spanish foot moved forward and delivered their volleys, his countenance cleared. He galloped to and fro among the guns, directing their fire, and beheld with joy that the enemy's advance was checked. So fierce and deadly was the artillery fire, that the buccaneers at last began to turn and run, amid the smoke, and a cessation of the musketry announced that they were in full retreat.

The old Governor galloped forward to the lines of infantry, to encourage them to charge, and found them much shaken. They had lost heavily, and worse than that, they were scared.

With the quick decision of a soldier, he withdrew them behind the shelter of the guns, and for several minutes a pause of silent expectation took place.

The buccaneers could be seen in the distance, clustered in knots, while a single mounted man—their leader—was galloping backward and forward with wild gestures, as if exhorting them to a fresh effort.

It was while Don Alonzo was watching them and his own men, that a pikeman, who was straggling past him to the town, wounded, stopped beside his commander, and respectfully saluting, extended his hand, holding a small gold cross.

Don Alonzo looked at him surprisedly.

"What is the matter, soldier? What's this?"

"So please your excellency, I was on guard last night over the witch of Darien, and the old hag gave me this, which I promised to deliver to your excellency."

Don Alonzo took it with superstitious hesitation.

"A cross! In possession of an Indian witch! May it not be a new sorcery? Nay, I have heard crosses will avert witchcraft."

Then he looked carefully at the cross, a tiny thing set with jewels: and as he looked, his countenance changed and became deadly pale.

"What—what is this?" he cried, in low, hoarse tones. "What—where got she this? Who is she?"

Blas Ortiz looked astonished.

"The old witch your excellency saw. Captain Mendoza put her in—"

A deep groan burst from Don Alonzo as he spoke.

"God of Heaven, I sent her to death, and she knows about my child! And I only know it now."

Crack, crack, crack!

The enemy's skirmishers opened again, and came rushing on with a yell whose ferocity told of the desperation of the buccaneers. Just in the crisis of a fierce battle, when victory trembled in the balance, and the commander of the Spaniards needed all his wits, came this tiny cross a messenger from a dead woman, whom he himself had sent to her doom in ignorance.

And this cross he recognized in a moment as one he had hung round the neck of his child, Pepita, eighteen years before, when she was a baby in arms. She must then have survived the wreck, or this cross must have been taken from her dead body, washed ashore.

Which was it? Oh, for one moment to ask the question, to question Don Luis, to do *something!*

But stern, pitiless war, that slays all alike, was sweeping down on them, in a ferocious band of desperate ruffians, led by the scourge of all Spaniards, Morgan himself.

Already the fire was warming up, and the artillery opening grape on the advancing pirates. The Spaniards were wavering, and needed support, and the only one able to give it was the Governor, torn with conflicting emotions. He looked round for Mendoza. The captain of the guards was gone, and with him every one of the gay cavaliers who had galloped on so proudly in the morning.

"God help us, for I can only do my duty," said Espinosa, despairingly, and he galloped up to the infantry, just as the buccaneers charged recklessly in with swords and pistols, yelling like demons.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SACK.

DONA INEZ sat in her chamber listening to the reports of the cannon, and wondering how the battle was going. The streets below her were deserted, for the women and children were all hiding in the houses, and the able-bodied men were in the field.

Since she had seen her father and husband go out in the morning she had had no means of intelligence, save to listen to the noise of the battle.

And that grew louder and louder every minute, the reports of the guns more and more incessant, while the rolling rattle of the musketry increased momentarily. It was the very first contest at which the girl had ever been a near auditor, and she was utterly unused to the sounds of war.

And yet she reasoned from the sounds of battle as correctly as a veteran.

After all it does not take long to acquire that art. First she heard nothing but a distant rumble of cannon. Then it came nearer, and the cackle of musketry was audible. Then both joined together quite plain, and a faint occasional distant yell was heard. Next she looked down from the window, and saw a few women at the doors, peering down the streets. Anon several of them made excited gestures, and she heard the rapid clatter of hoofs. Then came a single mounted soldier down the street, full speed, and went past like a whirlwind. Soon after was a furious burst of cannonading outside, with the sound of a gradually increasing yell, which came *nearer and nearer*. Then there was more clatter of hoofs, and Don Luis Mendoza, with a party of cavalry dragging a cannon, dashed past and was gone. Inez trembled violently, and throwing open the window, leaned far out to look. A dark stream of human beings was pouring down the streets from the fields outside, and a white pall of smoke hid the battle-field. The cannon reports were growing less and less, and the sound of the yelling came *nearer and nearer*. Inez hastily threw on her veil, and ran down the stairs of the palace to the entrance.

Here were grouped a number of frightened domestics, the women screaming, the men talking together. She saw the street, in the brief instants that intervened, full of people, and more were swarming out of the houses, and fleeing toward the port. A number of soldiers without arms, many wounded, all pale with terror and evidently demoralized, hurried along in the crowd.

And the cannonade had quite ceased.

Then Inez knew, as well as the great captain could have told her, that the day had gone against her countrymen.

What was she to do, whither to fly? The ir-

regular and fitful fire still maintained by the small-arms announced that her father must be still resisting, after the loss of his guns, with the remainder of his infantry; but the increasing crowd of fugitives who came running along, some with arms, some without, gave plain token that the combatants could not be far off.

Already the street was deserted by the citizens; the servants had fled to the port, and she was left alone by the palace gate, when the renewed reports of cannon were followed by the crash, crash of a round shot ricocheting along on the rough pavement and tearing a wide breach in an opposite house.

Again the novice understood what had happened as well as the veteran. Danger sharpened her senses.

The buccaneers had taken the Spanish guns, and were turning them against their owners!

The fight was virtually over from that moment. As the guns opened their fire on the town, and the shot crashed through the houses, the street became full of fugitives, fleeing in the wildest disorder. Inez, standing with clasped hands in the gateway, saw officer and soldier alike fleeing like cowards, and was recognized by many, who cried:

"His excellency's daughter! Fly, senora, the pirates are coming in millions! We must flee to the woods or go to sea! Come with us, senora! The foreign devils will eat you alive!"

But Inez only answered:

"My father—where is my father?"

And no one could tell her, so that she shrunk back into the palace, and allowed the cowards to pass.

And they were not long in passing, for all were at a run, and almost all had thrown away their weapons, and huddled together into a crowd. At least a thousand men were jammed together in that body, and all the parallel streets were equally full of men in full flight. And still Inez would not stir, for the being she loved best in all the world, her noble, white-haired father, was not among the fugitives; and her only thought now was to find him. Of her husband she thought nothing. She had seen him fleeing in safety, unmindful of her, at the very first touch of disaster, and a sense of indescribable contempt was growing up in her heart toward him.

At last the street was empty. A few distant, dropping shots were still audible as Inez wrapped mantle and veil around her, and calmly emerged into the street, bending her steps toward the very lines of the superstitiously dreaded pirates, without a tremor. Her whole mind seemed absorbed in the task of finding her father, and she forgot all other dangers.

In front of her, a hundred yards off, a knot of men, spread out as skirmishers, came cautiously along through the streets with poised muskets. Every now and then one of them stopped and fired down the street, past the advancing girl, at the distant crowd of fugitives; and still Inez seemed insensible to peril.

As she came near the men stared at her, but not one spoke a word, as the slight feminine figure, draped in black, glided past them in silence.

A cannon boomed in the distance, and the shot hummed over her head, and still she kept fearlessly on, passing with a rapid step the quiet empty streets, till the dead bodies of soldiers, here and there, told her she had reached the battle-field.

Then she was sensible, as if in a dream, of a crowd of men halted by some cannon, talking and shouting confusedly, and knew she was close to the mysterious buccaneers, of whom she had heard such terrible atrocities.

Then, for the first time, she trembled and stopped. The full peril of her position flashed on her, but she retained her calmness. The men were all afoot save one, in bright uniform of black, scarlet and gold, with a brilliant gleaming breast-plate. This was their leader, she thought, and to him she advanced with dignity, throwing back her veil:

The wild buccaneers, rude and reckless as they were generally, shrunk back on all sides in dead silence, and left a free passage for the Governor's daughter to the presence of their chief.

Then Inez spoke in a clear and distinct voice:

"Senor, I am Dona Inez de Mendoza, daughter of the Governor of Panama, and I have come in search of my father. Tell me he is not hurt, but only a prisoner, for the Virgin's sake?"

Then, for the first time, she looked up in the leader's face, and met the eyes of Don Enrique Morganos.

"Is Morgan's face so changed that Inez has

forgotten it?" said the buccaneer chief, in a low tone. "Your father was wounded ere I could save him, but the surgeon is attending him now."

As he spoke, he dismounted, and resigned his horse to an attendant.

"Forward, and pass the orders to occupy the town," he said to those around him. "Keep the men from drinking, for I have news that the Spaniards have poisoned the wine in the town. Search everywhere for the Indian queen, but do no violence to the women. I shall occupy the Governor's palace. Bring the wounded Spanish officer thither."

Then he turned to Inez, and offered his arm with a grave courtesy, that recognized nothing of the time.

She refused it for a moment, saying:

"Oh, senor, where is my father? Let me see him first."

He shook his head.

"Don Alonzo will be brought to the palace, and you can see him there. But I made a solemn oath, only yesterday, to your husband, madam, that, if he harmed Queen Lola of Darien, I would slay every one in Panama, and burn the town. Has she been harmed?"

"I know not of whom you speak, senor," she said, wonderingly.

"So much the worse," said Morgan, frowning. "Foul play has been dealt to her, and woe betide the dealers, when I find them."

Again he offered his arm, and Inez, trembling with vague fear, accompanied him within the precincts of the doomed city.

CHAPTER XIV.

PEPITA.

DON LUIS MENDOZA stood on the aftercastle of the stately galleon San Salvador, and watched, with trembling limbs and ashy face, the hurried efforts of the crew to make sail and escape from the sack of Panama. Selfish and cowardly, as soon as he saw that the fortune of the day was going against his friends, the captain of the guards had given up the contest, without an effort to restore it, and fled from the wavering field at the very moment when a single vigorous charge might have decided it in favor of the Spaniards.

Half-crazed with terror, he had forgotten his wife and everything but his own safety, galloped to the shore, taken boat, and fled to the galleon his caution had provided. She was only half-manned with sailors, and the few demoralized soldiers who had fled with him, but she was heavily armed and a good sailer, and loaded with all the wealth of the Panama churches.

As he beheld the sails go slowly up, while the vessel swung short over her anchor, the captain's mind was greatly relieved, for he had been in a frenzy of anxiety for fear the enemy should overtake him and spoil his little game.

The bay was full of boats putting off to the various vessels, and several approached the galleon, while their inmates implored to be taken aboard.

To all he returned the same answer:

"There is no room. This is the Governor's ship."

The noise of fighting in the town had died away, to be replaced by the shouts and yells of the buccaneers roving through the streets, intent on plunder. Every minute he expected to hear the hum of a shot from one of the captured batteries firing at the galleon, but still the guns were silent; and at last the anchor left the bottom, the big foresail bellied out, and the Salvador slowly forged ahead out of the bay among a crowd of boats, standing seaward.

Even as she left the anchorage a number of wild-looking figures rushed out on the beach, and seizing a canoe, started in slow pursuit. But there were only two paddles in the canoe, and the buccaneers were already half drunk. They soon stopped and assaulted a large boat full of women fleeing from the town, which was overtaken in a few minutes.

Don Luis smiled triumphantly as he saw the boat stop, and the white foam bubbled round the prow of the Salvador.

"Stay there, senores," he muttered. "Ye have your reward, but I have mine too. 'Tis always well to have two strings to your bow."

Now he paced the aftercastle with an air of great relief, for the Salvador was fast sailing out of gun-shot, and already the open sea was free before them. The Pearl Islands lay on the larboard bow, and the trade-wind inflated every sail of the galleon as she sped away from danger.

"What if there are but fifty men on board," muttered Don Luis. "There are no buccaneers on these seas yet, and fifty are enough to man

this ship, if not to fight her. Our guns will frighten every one else, and no one can dispute my title to these treasures now."

He remained on deck till the steeples of Panama were gray in the distance, and the fears of his men had quieted down. There was no sign of pursuit; and if there had been, he feared it not. Not a vessel in the harbor could catch the Salvador, and she was the only armed ship short of Callao. Toward Callao he determined to take his way, to announce the death of the Governor, the taking of Panama, and the fearful ferocity of those pirates, who, from twelve hundred had already spread in Spanish reports to fifty thousand. Also he was determined to make a full report of his own heroism in defending the town, and carrying off its treasures untouched. The church property he would give up. He was a good Catholic. But as for Don Alonzo's plate, and certain bags of doubloons, poor Don Alonzo was dead, and the gold was his in right of his wife. What if his wife were dead, too? Ah, then he had another card to play.

And as he thought of it, he smiled and rubbed his hands, and turned round to descend the ladder into the cabin below.

The vessel was already in order, and Don Luis was recognized as her commander. He stationed a sentry at the cabin door, saying:

"Let no one in, on any pretext, till I call."

Then he entered the cabin, and locked the door.

The cabin of the galleon was magnificently furnished, and far more lofty and commodious than that of a modern vessel of the same size. It was hung with tapestry, and decorated with carving and gilding of the most ornate character, while the breeches of four richly-ornamented stern-chaser cannon gave a warlike aspect to the apartment.

In the midst of the cabin the wily captain of the guards stopped, and lifting up a ring in the floor, raised a trap-door, and disclosed a flight of stairs, leading to the lowest recesses of the vessel.

"Come forth," he said, in a quick, commanding voice; and then retired and took his seat on the couch close by.

There was a slow, faltering step on the ladder, and then the dark, withered features of the Witch of Darien rose above the trap. The old woman slowly ascended to the cabin, and stood trembling before the captain.

Don Luis, who had been trembling with craven fear an hour before, was now as cool as possible. Indeed, the manner of the gallant Spaniard might have been fairly described as hectoring, as he curtly ordered her to shut down the trap.

The witch silently obeyed, and stood before him.

"So, my lovely damsel, your teeth are drawn," he said, sneeringly. "I have outwitted and beaten your piratical friend, and you are on the seas, in my power, while he is on the land, searching for you in Panama. What think you? Do you believe he will save you yet?"

In a low sweet voice, a strange contrast to her withered face, the Witch of Darien answered him:

"I know he will, senor. He promised to love Lola forever."

"He's welcome to you, when I let him have you," said the Spaniard, with a sneer. "You are of more importance than you deem, my pretty damsel. Do you know why I made you assume the disguise you wear?"

"I can guess now," said the witch, calmly. "I have learned much since I have been in the power of the white men."

"What have you learned?"

"I have learned the reason you dare not put me to death," said she, steadily. "The soldier on guard told me last night."

"Ha! what did he tell you?" asked Mendoza, starting.

"He saw this face, and told me whose it was like."

As she spoke, the disfiguring rags and hideous mask dropped from her form, and Lola, the captive queen of Darien, stood revealed. But no longer in the savage dress of the Indian princess was Lola arrayed. Instead of that, she wore the robes of a Spanish lady of rank, and thus arrayed, her likeness to Inez was startling.

"Ay, Don Luis," she said, proudly, while the amazed captain sat gazing at her, bewildered; "you thought that the poor Indian maid you had threatened with nameless tortures, if she revealed herself, was completely cowed to obey your will. Know, senor, that for years past I

have known who I am, and only the love of my old wild, free life has kept me from claiming my kindred, and joining my people. The old priest who found me alive on my mother's breast, sixteen years ago, and buried her on the sea-shore, told me all about it when I grew to womanhood. I know who I am—Pepita del Campo; and ere this, my father has received the cross with my name inscribed on it, that was hidden in my hair when you stole me like a traitor. Now, senor, stop me if you dare. My sister's clothes were left here, but where is my sister? I will go find her."

And she swept proudly to the door of the cabin, and laid her hand on the lock.

Mendoza, for the first time, seemed to remember himself. He had plenty of courage when fighting women, and he sprang forward like a tiger on her. Pepita—as we must call her henceforth—shrieked, and tried to turn the key, but the brute was too quick and decided.

"Scream away," he said, savagely, as he dragged her away from the door. "They'll not mind you. So you've been masquerading in my wife's clothes, and pretend to be her sister. Very well."

He forced her down on the sofa with a heavy fall, and continued:

"Now, mark my words, my lady: out of this cabin you do not go till you sign the papers I require of you; and if you try to appeal to the crew—hearken."

And he leaned forward and whispered in her ear.

Pepita turned deathly pale and trembled in every limb.

CHAPTER XV.

In a large and sumptuous apartment of the Governor's palace at Panama, lay Don Alonzo del Campo y Espinosa, wounded unto death, with two bullets in his body and a saber-cut on his head. The last might have been cured, and neither of the former was mortal, but the three together had caused such a loss of blood that the Governor was dying.

By the side of the couch knelt Inez, in tears, and Morgan stood a little distance off, with gloomy face and folded arms, sternly surveying the form of Blas Ortiz, the wounded pikeman, who stood before him, ready to drop with weakness.

Weak as was Don Alonzo also, he was speaking to the soldier, and the buccaneer chief was listening to the conversation, occasionally putting in a short, grim question.

"Speak quick, Ortiz," said the Governor, faintly. "I have not long to live. You say you got the cross from the old Indian woman brought in as prisoner by Mendoza?"

"I did, senor."

"How came she to do it?" interjected Morgan.

"I was placed on guard over her, senor. Don Luis gave me strict orders not to converse with her. He told me she was a dangerous witch who could assume any face she pleased. But when she gave me the cross, I knew it must be a mistake, for crosses are death to witches. Don Luis looked in, and left a lamp in the outer room. When he was gone, the witch looked out, and strange to relate, senor, her old and wrinkled face was gone. Had I not seen her before, I could have sworn 'twas his excellency's daughter, Dona Inez herself. But it must have been enchantment, for when the relief came in, they opened the door to see if 'twas all right, and I swear to your excellency, the same old woman was there, and we all saw her distinctly. Then, before the new sentry was on, came Don Luis, and took her away, and that was the last we saw of her."

"Have you heard anything since?" demanded the Governor.

"My comrade, Pepe Diaz, who was killed this morning, was one of the guard that followed Don Luis, senor. He says that the captain took her out in a boat to the great galleon, and came back without her. Whether he slew her, or put her on board the galleon, we cannot tell. He came back alone."

"And the galleon escaped, thanks to my drunken ruffians," muttered the buccaneer. Then to Espinosa:

"The story is plain, senor, and you are not to blame. This wretch, Mendoza, has deceived you and all of us. He disguised the queen of Darien as an old woman, and her own father did not recognize her. She is at sea with him, whether as Lola of Darien or Pepita del Campo. He is a deep plotter, this Mendoza, and has fooled us all. Woe betide him, when I catch him. Make your will, senor. I am your enemy, but you can trust me for all that. Give Pepita's

interests into my hands, and I swear to you I will protect her when I find her, and avenge her on this Mendoza, if I come too late for any thing else. Refuse, and I perform my oath; and then, woe to Panama."

Espinosa lay silent for some moments, then said:

"And Inez—what of her?"

"Dona Inez is my enemy's wife," said Morgan, coldly. "She is Lola's sister also. If your excellency wishes her restored to her husband, I will do it, but only when I have punished him as he deserves."

The Governor shuddered slightly. The buccaneer's words were very quiet and decorous, but there was a certain swelling of the two side muscles of the square, lean jaw of the chief, and a dilating of the white of the eye, that told of a tempest of passion surging within, only restrained by the iron will of the man.

He trembled as he thought of his daughter—the only one that he had known till now—exposed to the pitiless vengeance of the Welsh buccaneer, who was renowned for the cruelties he had committed when unable to accomplish his will otherwise.

"What do you wish me to do, senor?" he asked, faintly. "Be merciful, for I have not long to live."

"Call a notary and make your will," said Morgan, harshly. "Leave half of your goods to your daughter Pepita, and appoint me her guardian. I will take care the will be obeyed."

The Governor considered a while.

"I will do it. Send for the notary. I will trust you, senor, for you have proved a more generous foe than I thought."

Morgan nodded abruptly.

"Ay, ay, you shall see, and he shall feel."

Then he left the room, and went down the palace steps to the street.

All along the streets of Panama groups of fierce buccaneers were strolling, and others were searching the houses and bringing forth valuables to a great pile in the middle of the public square.

An order and decency prevailed in the whole expedition, which spoke of an iron discipline. Private plunder was not allowed by the buccaneers, who were by no means the lawless pirates we have been accustomed to consider them. On the contrary, Morgan acted under a commission from the English king, Charles II., and issued commissions to his captains, as admirals of the British forces. The plunder of Panama was all brought together, and carefully divided in shares, according to a regular scale, wherein wounds as well as rank were considered, and the man who lost a limb was paid for it with five hundred doubloons.

Drunkenness there was little or none now, for the leader's ruse of suggesting poison in the wine had effectually stopped the prevailing vice on the second day. But the first had been wasted, and Morgan had learned, when too late, of the escape of the galleon and what she contained in treasure, besides the discovery that Pepita was probably on board, if not dead.

As he walked along, gloomily brooding over the news, and planning vengeance in the future, he forgot all about Don Alonzo and Inez, the girl whom he had once been captivated by. Absence had cured him of part of that love, her marriage of the rest; but there was an angry devil lurking in the buccaneer's heart as he thought of Lola, whom he loved now, in the power of Inez's husband, and of Inez in his own power.

"Let him look to himself," he muttered. "If he has Pepita, I have Inez; and the one sister shall pay for the other's wrongs."

He passed through the streets, dropping a word here, an order there, till he arrived at the beach. He found it encircled with the charred remnants of burned houses. In the first fury of the assault the day before, the torch, applied by the ruthless hand of the destroyer, had consumed more than half of Panama.

As he stood gloomily watching the smoking ruins, a Spaniard came humbly toward him, and told him that the Governor was dying, and wished to see him. Slowly he retraced his steps and entered the palace.

Don Alonzo was indeed dying. He was so far gone as to be unable to speak, and he faintly indicated by signs a wish for the buccaneer to read a parchment that lay on the couch.

Reluctantly Morgan took the instrument and read it. It was Don Alonzo's will, bequeathing all his possessions equally to his two children, constituting his conquering enemy guardian of both, and charging him to find and rescue his daughter Pepita, and to marry her, if he would.

"And, forasmuch as my daughter Inez is

wedded to a bad man," continued the will, "who will surely ill-treat her, if he gets a chance, I straitly commit her to the care of Don Enrique Morganos aforesaid, charging him on the honor of a soldier, to protect her from all harm, and to guard her as his sister. And if he fail to do so, then may the curse of a dead man rest on him and his forever, and may he never know peace in this world or the next."

Morgan read the will steadily through. Its close was interrupted by a struggle from the wounded man.

The chief looked him in the face gravely, bowed his head, and said:

"I accept the trust."

Don Alonzo smiled faintly, and fell back, lead.

Three days after, a column of loaded mules, whose packs were all of gold, silver and jewels, threaded its way through the forests of Darien, surrounded by the triumphant and satiated freebooters.

Morgan, gloomy and silent, rode in the van, and Inez del Campo followed, a close prisoner. To Chagres the column took its way, where the plunder of the expedition was divided, and whence Morgan took ship for parts unknown.

For some unexplained reason he sent back Dona Inez to Panama, with a number of liberated Spaniards, but before he went he had a long and secret discussion with her, from which he came forth gloomier than before. Then he left, alone, and the greatest of all the buccaneer exploits was over. What became of the chief no one knew.

CHAPTER XVI.

NEW PANAMA.

A YEAR has passed since the burning of Panama, and the city has partly risen from its ashes, but on another site, surrounded by fortifications. In all that year not a sound has been heard of the lost Pepita del Campo, nor of the galleon San Salvador. Whatever the intentions of its commander, that vessel never reached Peru, but had disappeared from human sight as completely as if she had never existed.

In those days it was not hard to lose one's self in the Pacific. Outside of the regular track from the Philippines to Panama, the whole ocean was regarded as a solitude, into which no one dared to penetrate till a hundred years later.

Morgan, the buccaneer, had also disappeared from his usual haunts, no one knew whither. Peace being concluded between England and Spain, the more powerful expeditions were now out of the question, as they required a cover of legality in order to be fitted out with safety.

Just one year to a day from the time of the sack of Panama, a strange vessel, long and low, with lateen sails, was seen in the offing, off the Pearl Islands, and the alarm spread all through the city that the pirates were coming again, for the rig of the *periagua* was recognized as one peculiar to the pirates.

Then the watchman on the new tower beheld the fleet of pearl-boats, that had been attending the fishery at the islands, hastily slip their anchors and come sailing toward the harbor, followed by the strange vessel.

And as they came in, past a certain small island on the way, a singular phenomenon took place before the watchman's sight.

Without any assignable cause, three of the foremost vessels suddenly disappeared in the depths of the sea in a cloud of white spray!

The rest of the pearl-boats scattered in all directions like a flock of frightened water-fowl, and the strange vessel hauled her wind and stood off again to sea.

The watchman had hardly got over his astonishment, when he caught sight of the sails of a large ship in the distance, behind the little island of Tobago, and distinguished the white smoke that told she was firing her guns at the stranger, while the dull booming reports echoed over the water to the city.

It was not long before the whole population of Panama was out in the streets to witness the fight, which soon came into plain view.

The strange ship steered out from behind the island, and the *periagua* was seen to steer directly toward her, while every now and then the flash of a gun from her sides was followed by a report that told of much lighter metal.

The contest seemed entirely unequal, and yet the large ship, a full-rigged frigate, was running away from the *periagua* toward the city, evidently anxious to escape.

How long this might have lasted there is no saying, when the smaller vessel suddenly hauled her wind once more, a little short of the place where the three boats had so mysteriously dis-

appeared. There was a great commotion in the sea, at the same time, and a strange appearance, as of some curious monster rising from the water; and then the stranger was away like a flash; and the frigate, hoisting Spanish colors, stood in, and came to anchor under the guns of the forts.

Much puzzled, the watchman descended to make his report.

At the same time, in a new house in another part of the city, Dona Inez Mendoza, from the summit of the *azotea* or flat roof, beheld all this scene, and trembled as she looked.

Some presentiment told her that that vessel held her husband, returned to claim her and her father's property by the operation of the law.

Where he had been, and what he had been doing all this time, she knew not. Whether the strange and audacious vessel that pursued him was the bark that held the only man that could save her, or not, she was ignorant. She only knew that Morgan had promised her, a year before, that he would not rest till he had found her sister Pepita, if alive. That she herself was not still with him was owing to her own fears as to her strength of mind. When it was too late, Inez, wife of Mendoza, had made the fatal discovery that she loved Morgan. True, his own love had gone to another, but the poor senora dreaded the dangers of the old passion reviving.

At her own request, he had sent her back to Panama, there to wait the arrival of Don Luis, who, they knew, was pretty sure to come back to the scene of Don Alonzo's property.

"When he comes back," Morgan had said, "I shall be there, when he and you least expect it."

"And now Luis has come, and he is powerless," murmured she, as she looked at the stately Spanish frigate coming to anchor, and the diminutive *periagua* gliding along in the distance.

As she spoke, a boat dropped from the side of the vessel, and moved toward the city, propelled by twelve oars.

It was received at the quay by a detachment of the guard, for Panama was much better protected now than when it was taken by the buccaneers, and the fortifications were heavily armed and fully manned. The commander of the boat landed, and then the houses shut in further view from Dona Inez.

But she had seen enough already. She knew well enough who was coming, and descending to the great saloon, she calmly awaited the arrival of the person she knew was sure to come at last.

And she had not long to wait. Within half an hour there was a thundering knock at the door below, and soon after the tramp of an armed heel coming along the paved hall. Then the door opened, and Don Luis Mendoza, as handsome as ever, in magnificently worked armor, and covered with orders and decorations, entered the room.

The Spaniard advanced to his wife with an appearance of great affection, exclaiming:

"Querida Inez, how have I wearied for you this year of toil and danger!"

Dona Inez waved him off as he came near, and checked him with a short inquiry:

"Luis, where is my sister?"

Don Luis actually changed color at this question. For a moment he stammered and hesitated. Then he put on a face of innocence, asking:

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, where is my sister Pepita, who was a captive in your ship, when you fled and left me to the mercy of the buccaneers?"

Don Luis laughed uneasily.

"You are crazy. What should I know about your sister? She is dead, long ago."

"How long ago?"

Again the direct question staggered him, but he recovered.

"Twenty years ago, I suppose. You said so."

"Then where have you been, all this year?"

She knew that he lied, but dissembled in her turn.

Don Luis swelled with importance.

"I have been to Spain, senora, and have cruised against those buccaneers who slew your father. I have avenged him fully and recovered great treasures; and, moreover, my father is dead, and I am now the duke of Mendoza. His majesty's own hand has made me a knight of the Golden Fleece, and I have come to reclaim the duchess, my wife, from her solitude, and to assume the vice-royalty of New Spain, whither I am now bound, by way of Acapulco."

Inez looked steadily at the man she was compelled to call husband, and a feeling of the deepest distress possessed her. Something told

her all was not right, and yet she knew not how to proceed to find out.

At last she said, somewhat bitterly:

"Your grace has tarried very long. God, and not you, protected me from the dangers of the assault when you fled."

"Retreated, not fled, Inez. What could I do against such numbers? But I have avenged it on the buccaneers, and they are after me with a vast fleet. No doubt you were surprised at the way I sailed into harbor, chased by a single *periagua*. Alas, child, there are twenty more concealed behind yonder islands, and had I stood out to fight them, I should infallibly have lost my ship. But the blessed virgin interposed, and saved me, by sending that fearful monster, the sea-cat—"

Inez shuddered violently.

"The sea-cat? What, is there one in our bay? Good heavens, Luis, what shall we do? Oh, I shall never forget those fearful eyes and writhing arms. What shall we do?"

"Steer clear of the place he lies," said Don Luis, coolly. "He swallowed the crews of three pearl-boats, and I saw him rise to receive the pirates. But they sheered off in time. As long as he stays there, the pirates dare not enter by that passage."

Dona Inez shuddered again, and murmured:

"It is a fatality. He cannot save me or Pepita."

"I shall sail for Acapulco to-morrow, God willing," said Don Luis, finally. "I expect my lady duchess to accompany me, in spite of her cool reception; and, meantime, I have business with the commandante here. So, for the present, farewell."

And he was gone, and Inez alone.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MIDNIGHT PROWLER.

NIGHT closed over the new city of Panama, a night of darkness, with the moon above, while a heavy, crawling, malarious mist shut out the view of the stars overhead.

In the thick darkness that enveloped everything the sickly gleam of lanterns shone out here and there, at the edge of the bay, marking the line of the just completed ramparts. The sea-wall was finished, but on the land-side there were many long stretches as yet quite open to an enemy. The Spaniards knew that their best defense as yet was in the fact that they had little left to plunder, and the long stretch of walls surrounded very few houses above the rank of huts.

In a nook of the bay, opposite the side of the old city, a line of canoes was slowly and silently paddling to the shore, all loaded with men. The ruins of old Panama were already nearly hidden by the luxuriant vegetation of the tropics, and the few walls and towers that remained were covered with creepers. Not a living being tenanted them save the monkeys and birds of the forest, and, as the canoes reached the shore and disembarked their crews, not a sound was heard.

Quietly and cautiously, like a troop of ghosts, the strangers climbed up the steep and rocky beach here, and disappeared among the ruins.

Half an hour later they might have been found clustered together, to the number of some fifty men, in the ruined basement of the old watch-tower of San Jerome.

In the midst was the form of a man, evidently in authority, who was giving them some directions in a low voice:

"You will remain here," he said, "till I come back, which will be before to-morrow night. You will keep yourself hidden from the view of any passing Spaniard, unless he should be fool enough to come so close as to find out where you are. In that case, seize him and keep him till I come back. If I am not here by midnight to-morrow, I shall be dead. In that case, go back to the vessel, and never spare a Spaniard's life so long as you are on the seas."

A stern hum of assent followed the last words, and the chief gathered his cloak around him and left the ruin. The men left behind stretched themselves silently on the ground and prepared to pass the night in sleep.

Meanwhile the leader threaded the ruins of the once populous streets with the air of a man who knew his way well, and quitted the precincts of the old city, emerging on a mass of black rocks, which once formed the northern boundary. Over these he clambered with some difficulty, and saw before him a stretch of fair white beach, the only barrier between him and the walls of New Panama.

With a free and careless step he advanced to the city, hidden by the dense white fog and only

guided on his way by the sound of the softly lapping surf at his left hand.

Every ten minutes or so he would stop and listen intently.

No sound but the wash of the waves was heard for some time.

At last he caught sight of the sickly yellow gleam of lamps some way ahead, and recognized the line of the sea-wall. As soon as he saw that, he turned to the right, left the shore, and struck off into the fields and woods.

At regular intervals the drowsy cry of "*Sentinella alerta*" from the city announced the position of the line of guards.

The stranger skirted them at a respectful distance, till he arrived opposite the largest and longest of the gaps in the fortifications, which he could see from the different position of the lights, down on the ground.

The unknown seemed to be perfectly familiar with the way, for he turned in here, and advanced boldly toward the line of sentries.

Steady as was his approach, however, it was entirely noiseless. He seemed to be shod with velvet, so quietly did he move.

When he was close to the line of lights, he directed his course midway between them and halted once more to listen.

The steps of several sentries were audible, pacing to and fro, but they themselves were invisible.

Then the stranger sunk down on the earth and looked toward the dim lights in the fog. For about six inches from the earth the atmosphere was comparatively clear, and the legs of the pacing guards became visible. By looking upward, also, the rest of their bodies loomed out against the faint light of the sky above the mist, and their positions were definable.

Two of them were coming toward him.

Silently the stranger awaited their coming, till the two sentries met. One of them growled out a sulky remark to the other about the fog, and the other replied:

"Never mind; the relief will soon be round. The fog will keep off the buccaneers."

"Ay," growled the first, "if they're here. But that's not likely, with four regiments of pikes and muskets, and a first-class frigate in the bay."

"Good-night, and a better temper, Pepe," said the second, and both sentries turned their backs and paced away.

When they were half down their beats, the stranger rose as silently as he had come, and coolly walked through the picket line, hidden by the fog.

In another moment he was safe within the city limits.

He advanced now with much more caution, for the streets were full of the materials of buildings in progress, and he seemed to be ignorant of the localities. He passed silently on amid piles of stones and timber, without meeting a human being or seeing a light for some time. It was near midnight, and moreover he was in a part of the city as yet uninhabited!

At last the glimmer of lights in a line ahead announced that he was coming to a more populous locality, and shortly after he ran up against another person meeting him in the fog, with a clash of arms that told that both were soldiers.

"*Madre de dios, camarado*, can't you see where you're going?" exclaimed the second man, angrily. "You're too careless to be a gentleman, do you hear?"

The unknown answered the insulting tone of the soldier with great mildness, considering the dueling propensities of the age.

"I humbly crave your pardon, cavalier. I am not yet used to your Panama fogs, and I was looking for some one to tell me the way to the Calle Nuevo."

The soldier seemed pacified at once. He thought he had cowed down the other, and in a tone of more courtesy, he said:

"Yonder is the Calle Nuevo. The first large house you come to belongs to Don Luis Mendoza, who came in this afternoon from the old country. He's a lucky dog. They say he brings back a million pesos, that he has stolen from those Godless buccaneers."

The stranger gave a short laugh.

"Ha! he says that, does he? *Buenos noches*, señor."

And he turned abruptly away. The strange soldier, who seemed to be an officer of some kind from his language, did not seem disposed to let him go so easily. He had cowed him down once, as he thought, and he was resolved to do it again. He touched him on the shoulder sharply, and arrested his course, saying roughly:

"Hola, señor, you have not told me your name, yet. I am Don Ramon Gutierrez, first swordsman of Panama. Who the devil are you?"

The unknown turned quietly round. He was standing close to the latter, and spoke in a peculiarly mild and pleasant tone.

"Do you really wish to know my name, señor? I would not advise you to ask it, for you will not live long after you have heard it."

Don Ramon laughed scornfully and folded his arms.

"Tell me, and I'll take the risk," he said.

The stranger whispered something in his ear, and almost at the same instant executed a sudden wrestling trick which overthrew the Spaniard like a child. Standing close to him, he leaned forward, casting one heel behind that of the Spaniard, and in the same instant pushed him with both hands on his shoulders. Don Ramon's heels flew up, and the unknown, continuing the impulse with tremendous strength, brought the other to the pavement with a crash, the back of his head striking the stones with such violence that he lay senseless.

"Much good may the name do you," muttered the stranger, in English. "If your skull's whole in the morning, 'twill be because my arm has lost its pith."

He deliberately lifted up the head of the fallen man and gave it one crack against the stones. Then he turned away, and advanced toward the Calle Nuevo with fearless steps.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A VISITOR.

DONA INEZ MENDOZA was kneeling at her oratory, praying fervently to Heaven to release her from her bondage and restore her sister to her, when she heard a light tap at her casement.

In great alarm she started to her feet, for she was all alone in that part of the house, which was built, like most Spanish-American houses, on a single story, rambling in all directions. An external veranda surrounded the building, and on this the intruder, whoever he was, must be standing.

At once she thought of her husband, and the thought filled her with aversion. She knew he had a right to enter, and yet she knew him as the probable murderer of her sister, and as a false cavalier who fled in the hour of danger.

All these thoughts crossed her like a flash as she faintly asked:

"Who's there?"

"Enrique, thy brother," was the low reply.

"Let me in, but put out the light first. I have much to say and ask."

With a nervous start Inez recognized the voice of Morgan, and in a moment she had extinguished the light and flown to the window, only protected as it was by slight blinds. Without a word, the other entered the room, and stood listening to some sound in the street below. After a long pause he turned round and whispered:

"It is well. He has passed. I thought 'twas my enemy. And now, Inez, you have seen him to-day. I have kept my word, and am here."

"But, oh, Señor Morganos, think of the danger were you found here. There are troops enough in the city—"

"I know all, Inez. But Mendoza, tell me, has he said aught about your sister? I have chased him over the wide world, from Spain to the Pacific, and have not come up with him till now. Said he aught of Pepita?"

"Not a word, save this."

And she detailed the morning's conversation with Don Luis in full.

The buccaneer listened till she had finished, and then he said:

"Pepita is dead, and he has killed her. If not he would not have come back for you."

"But what makes you think so?"

"Listen. I have traced every step of that villain's course since he fled from before me, a year ago. His vessel never went to Peru, but sailed away down the coast. And when I procured a vessel in Jamaica, and sailed in chase, he had disappeared. But I soon heard of him, Inez, and what, think you, was he doing? The cowardly dog had taken a leaf out of my book, and turned buccaneer. Ay, girl, but not as we do, against the enemies of our country, but on his own friends and countrymen, the Spanish merchants. Ship after ship disappeared from view, plundered and sunk by him, for they took him for a friend, and allowed him to come alongside. There was no danger where he went. At last one of my fleet met him, grown fat and insolent, and fought him. Well, Inez, 'twas but a periagua with thirty men attacked him, and he took her. He had gathered four hundred

men on his frigate at last, and the capture was just what he wanted. He sunk the periagua, took her men to Spain, and thus accounted for his plunder as *captured from my buccaneers*. I heard of it in Cadiz, whither I went in disguise, and by my faith, the fellow cheated the whole court, and was made a hero of. Has he told you?—ay, he has—of his being appointed viceroy of New Spain. 'Tis true. But he will never get there alive, if he has harmed a hair of Pepita's head."

"But what can we do?" demanded Inez, timidly. "He has a large ship, and you have nothing but—"

"But brave men to take her. True. But you shall see it done, Inez. All I ask you to do is this. He says that he leaves for Acapulco to-morrow. He will want to take you with him. Delay going till night. Make any pretense you like not to be ready. But do not set foot on the frigate till after dark."

"I will try it," said Inez, hesitatingly.

"If you wish to see your sister again, do it," said Morgan, impressively. "I know what he has come here for, and I will let him do it. Your father's will shall be kept to the letter, and woe to him if he has defeated it by Pepita's death."

"But he could not have the heart to kill an innocent girl," said Inez, earnestly. "I can not believe it. He must be keeping her hidden away somewhere, in the hopes that we do not know of her existence, to claim her share as mine."

Morgan looked grim, as he answered:

"It may be so. 'Twere better for him he had never been born else."

Then there was a short silence, first broken by the buccaneer.

"Do you think he will come here to-night?"

Inez was glad for the darkness to cover her blushes, as she answered:

"No, no; in God's name, I hope not."

"If he comes, remember, he is your sister's murderer," said the buccaneer, solemnly. "For me, I must away. In your hands to-morrow will rest justice to the wicked. Do not go aboard till sunset. Farewell."

He hastily pressed her hand, and then turned and vanished through the window, while Inez returned to her prayers with redoubled fervor.

The daring freebooter passed down the veranda with the same noiseless tread with which he had entered the town, a fact easily explained. His heavy boots were muffled with strips of thick blanket, which made his tread as soft as that of a tiger. Morgan was heavily armed under his muffling cloak, and, being accustomed to dangerous enterprises, seemed to feel no uneasiness at his position, alone in a city full of foes. He assumed an air as if he was perfectly at home, and stalked down the street toward the well-remembered gap in the wall by which he had entered so cleverly.

At the end of the Calle Nuevo he came across the prostrate figure of Don Ramon, still insensible and breathing heavily.

"Fool," muttered Morgan, as he passed, "did you think to hector me with your Biscayan airs? I would have let you go had you been civil."

He had hardly uttered the words when another figure loomed up in the fog, and the noise of a clattering, swaggering stride became audible.

Instantly the buccaneer stepped to one side, and freeing his sword arm from the incumbering cloak, brought the hilt of the weapon to the front, and awaited the stranger. His quick senses realized who was the new-comer, though only seen once before, by moonlight, in spite of the white mist.

The approaching cavalier was Don Luis Mendoza, swaggering along in the direction of the Calle Nuevo.

The buccaneer ground out a fearful blasphemy between his teeth as he noted the form of the other, and suddenly drawing, said, harshly:

"Halt! or you're a dead man."

Don Luis did halt instantly. More, he jumped back with remarkable alacrity, and cried out, trembling:

"Who are you? What do you want with me?"

"Your sword," said the buccaneer, fiercely. "Draw it, or take it off, dog. Quick!"

Don Luis drew in a moment. He was a good fencer, and not quite a coward, but he was dreadfully frightened at the sudden apparition of this unknown man, challenging him so savagely.

No sooner was his sword out than the buccaneer pressed forward on him with a straight

strong lunge, so close to his body that the Spaniard had to leap back, with a shout of terror. Not a single feint or trick did Morgan use, but followed him up so close with his fierce, straight thrusts, in grim silence, that Mendoza backed, backed, and again still further, till he finally turned and ran away like a flash, yelling for help.

Morgan's sword followed him for several steps, prodding him to still greater efforts, and then the reckless freebooter plunged down a side street, heedless of the clamor that was gathering every moment from other parts of the town, at the sound of Mendoza's unearthly yells. He marched boldly on till he came to the deserted portion of the town, when he threaded his way among the half-finished houses, till he emerged close to the picket-line.

He found it on the alert, the sentries moving quickly up and down.

With a pistol in each hand and a sword between his teeth, he charged boldly down upon them, heedless of bullets in the dark, shot down a sentry within two feet, and dashed through the line out into the dense fog, throwing back a derisive laugh as he went.

Before he was fifty yards from the walls, he heard the clatter of horses in full pursuit.

CHAPTER XIX.

A BARGAIN.

AT noon of the next day, Don Luis Mendoza, bravely dressed and covered with orders, swaggered down the principal street of New Panama, swelling with satisfied vanity. No one who saw him could have recognized the trembling coward who, the night before, had fled down the Calle Nuevo through the fog, screaming for help against a single antagonist.

True, he had represented that antagonist as a crowd of men at the guard-house, which he had alarmed, and a patrol of cavalry had scourged the town and its environs in a vain search, till they stumbled into a swamp and lost themselves.

No trace had been found of the buccaneer; and when the insensible body of Don Ramon Gutierrez was discovered, the poor man was quite delirious, with a fractured skull, and unable to tell the name of his assailant.

Don Luis himself had no suspicion of the real character of his enemy. For a whole year he had enjoyed immunity from peril, and had filled his pockets by a series of cowardly piracies. The only enemy he had met had been the one small periagua which he had sunk, and its crew had told him that Morgan had retired from buccaneering.

The vessel that chased him into Panama he had taken for some rover of small means, and no one knew better than himself the lie he had told about a mythical pirate fleet among the islands. Rank cowardice had alone impelled his flight to Panama.

The reason of his coming was to become apparent that morning; for before he had gone twenty steps from the new Governor's palace, wherein he had lodged the night before, he was accosted by an old man, whose physiognomy and appearance were unmistakably *usurious*, who addressed him with:

"I kiss your hand, my lord duke. Your grace has concluded, I hope, to take my offer."

"Perhaps not, friend Abram," said Mendoza, loftily. "I have a better one already, fifty thousand Pesos for the lands and two for the house."

"Oh, holy father Jacob, senior, you must be jesting with your friend Abram. I know well the value of lands in this city, and no one can afford to do that without losing money. Consider, senior, that property is unsettled, and that we are still unprotected with walls. No one can do better with the nobility than friend Abram, who has had dealings with princes of the blood. Ah, my lord duke, be reasonable. Consider that my offer is not from an unreliable man. I will count out the gold in your presence, take all the risks of title, and only ask you to sign the deed in my favor."

"So will the other man," said Don Luis, rolling a cigarette. "Come, Abram, sixty thousand pesos, and the house and lands are yours. What do you say?"

"Impossible, my lord," said the other, firmly. "But if my lord will step into my humble little dwelling here, and talk over the matter, there is no saying that we might not come to an agreement."

And the money-lender indicated with a wave of his hand, a splendid new building about half a block distant, one of the finest in Panama, and the home of the richest man there.

Friend Abram was money-lender, slave-dealer, horse and cattle-buyer and seller, merchant in cotton, sugar, and indigo, and withal the keenest investor in real estate in Panama. Don Luis had come to Panama for the express purpose of carrying away his wife, and at once converting all the landed property of his late father-in-law into cash, so as to add to the wealth on board his galleon, and be able to enter his new government as became a *hidalgo*. He well knew that Abram was the only man in Panama possessed of money and boldness to buy in those perilous times, and his boast of another purchaser did not deceive the astute capitalist. Abram offered him about one-tenth the value of the property, but Abram knew Mendoza's hurry to be off, and suspected that all was not right with him. Consequently he traded on his necessities, and was determined to make a good bargain.

Don Luis followed him, willingly enough, to the house indicated, and was ushered by the old Jew into a magnificent saloon.

It must not be supposed that Abram had wasted his money in building this house. Far from it. He had bought it—for a song. In Panama, as in other places, there were plenty of spendthrifts, and one of these, a youth whose father had perished under tortures rather than disclose his buried wealth to the buccaneers, had spent the whole of it to boast that he had run up a palace in ten months and collapsed into friend Abram's hands after a month's riotous living.

"Now, my lord duke," said the old money-lender, rubbing his hands, as the other sunk on a gorgeous couch, "we can settle the affair here and at once satisfactorily. I will come half-way to meet you. Forty thousand pesos in gold counted to you on board your ship to-night, and the lands are mine. Is that a bargain?"

"Not a bit of it. Sixty thousand or I keep the title. There are bankers in New Spain who will gladly give me a hundred, but I have no time to bother with the business."

"Ah, my lord, do not be so hard. Remember that I am a poor man, and this property will be all outlays and no returns for a long time."

"That is your business, friend Abram. The property is mine in right of my wife, Dona Inez, and if I sell it, it's only to avoid trouble in the future."

"Trouble in the future," said Abram, keenly.

"Ah? then there are other heirs, I suppose?"

Don Luis colored slightly at his mistake.

"By no means. I meant no such thing. It would trouble me to pay the taxes. That is all."

"Then of course my lord will be glad to be rid of the trouble, and take the forty thousand pesos."

"Sixty or nothing."

And so the bargain went with wearisome monotony for nearly two hours, at the end of which both parties came to a compromise on fifty thousand pesos, and Old Abram chuckled to himself to think that he had outwitted the Spaniard, and acquired several leagues of hill and dale, and a handsome house for one-eighth of their value at the time.

To Don Luis, on the other hand, the whole transaction was clear gain. He had reason to know that his title was defective, and had resolved to cheat the money-lender at his own game.

As he rose to depart, he observed:

"Farewell, friend Abram. I am going now to announce my departure to the duchess, and hurry everything on board. You can take possession after we are gone, and come on board at sunset. Bring the money with you, and we will settle the business in my cabin. God be with you, senior."

And he lifted his hat with ceremonious courtesy and saluted the Jew money-lender.

"*Y con usted,*" (and with you) said friend Abram, with a low inclination.

Then as the handsome and pompous Don left the room, the old man chuckled to himself, and muttered:

"Ay, ay, we will settle it, and with half the money. I have a goodly stock of sweated doubloons that will reduce the price wonderfully, and moreover, once aboard, you will not be anxious to come back."

And the old miser ascended to his strong-room, and inspected several bags which bore a certain secret mark on them.

"They will do to pay him," he muttered. "I never could pass them here, but these Spanish nobles know nothing of money, and clippings and filings pay well, for there's no risk about them."

Friend Abram was certainly an industrious

man, as the condition of the coins in those bags would have shown to an expert.

Every coin had been subjected to the file more or less, some had little chips off the edges, others had holes bored in them. All had lost a part of their substance under the industrious hands of the old miser, who could plan at the same moment swallowing an estate of half a million, and sweating a doubloon of a dollar's worth of gold, so as not to show the abstraction. The labor of the leisure moments of twenty years was in those bags, and the opportunity to realize on it was his at last. The dust of the filings had long ago been melted down and coined, and now the opportunity to pay out the sweated money without fear of its coming back was his.

Friend Abram grinned and chuckled as he left the room, and ordered his black slave to get ready to attend him in the evening to the frigate of Don Luis Mendoza.

CHAPTER XX.

MIST ON THE WATERS.

AGAIN the warm darkness of the tropic night fell over the city of Panama; and the heavy, white mist, redolent of malaria, arose from swamp and forest, and rolled like a curtain over city and bay.

The sea-fog, which at certain seasons of the year is as thick at the equator as off Newfoundland, precipitated by occasional gusts of icy wind from the distant Cordilleras, was thicker even than that on the land, and made the city perfectly invisible.

At some little distance from the shore, however, there was a bright illumination, which pierced the mist for some fifty feet, and revealed a long row of lights below, with four lanterns of different colors at some height above.

A person very close by could have made out the light below to be shown at the open ports of a two-decked ship, and the colored lanterns above were clearly the masthead and bowsprit lights of the same ship.

This ship was none other than the frigate *Trinidad*, in which Don Luis had arrived, and which was now awaiting his embarkation, with the crew in gala dress, eating, drinking and singing.

A curious and very unpleasant crew was that of the *Trinidad*, and far worse than the fiercest of the buccaneers in appearance. The Spanish race produces about as repulsive a type of rascal, when it runs that way, as any on the face of the globe.

So long the prey of the English and French rovers, who were hardy and desperate fellows, courting an open fight, and scorning treachery or surprise except with very inferior numbers, the Spanish courage had sunk to a mere shadow of that which led Cortes to Mexico.

Cowardly and treacherous at their best, these Spaniards of Don Luis's crew had been engaged in decoying their own countrymen alongside for a whole year, only to murder them in cold blood when they got there. Such a course of life had tended to enhance the cruel *bull-fight* element of Spanish character, without increasing its courage, and Don Luis and his crew, at first timid, hesitating snappers-up of small craft, had become as hangdog a set of ruffians as could be found, the scum of all the captured vessels, the good men having walked the plank.

To these ruffians, all bravely dressed in the spoils of murder, and knowing that their ship was loaded with treasure, the time passed lightly away, as they waited for the leader who had been so successful with them.

At last the plash of oars was heard, and presently a great barge pulled alongside; and Don Luis, more gorgeous than ever in steel and gold, ascended the side, handing up a beautiful lady in mourning.

"By St. Hubert, patron of hunters and thieves," said one ruffian to his mate, "the captain has a fine wife. But, who is her face so like?"

"I'll swear I've seen something like it on board," replied the other, "but where, I can't say."

And further conversation was interrupted by the arrival of the senora's luggage in a pile of boxes in another boat.

Shortly after, the dip of oars announced a third, which contained the shriveled figure of friend Abram, with his black slave Matias, who groaned under the weight of two heavy bags of doubloons.

The sailors were about to order him roughly away, when Don Luis ordered him to be admitted on board, and escorted him into the cabin with ceremonious politeness, followed by Matias.

Then the door closed, and the sailors were left to wonder.

"By all the saints," said one, "but that the voyage is nigh over and the plunder has to be divided yet, I would go into that cabin for all Don Luis. But he knew what he was about when he put us under the guns of the fort. We can't do anything till we get on the high seas, and then—we'll see who has the treasures."

From whence it became apparent that discipline on board the frigate had not quite attained the completeness of that of the buccaneers, who never grumbled.

Far out in the darkness, at the same time, on the shelving beach, tangled with mangroves, that marked the site of old Panama, a line of canoes was being dragged out of the thickets in which they had been hid.

Morgan himself, wrapped in his dark cloak, watched the embarkation of his men, four or five in each little canoe, and only fifty all told. He had conceived some vague designs of surprising the city with that small force, but had abandoned it when he learned of Don Luis Mendoza's intention to set sail that night.

"He could not have played into my hands better," soliloquized the buccaneer, as he watched the embarkation. "I ask no better than to find him ready to sail."

Then he advanced to the last canoe, which had been kept waiting for him, took his seat in the stern, and lay back, while the canoes paddled out into the mist in a long line, head and stern close together.

Fifty feet from land they seemed to be floating in space, for the mist hid every thing but the bow of the next canoe.

But the keen senses of the buccaneers found a guide through the darkness, when every thing else failed; and the sound of the lapping waves on the beach kept them true to their direction.

Silent as ghosts glided the canoes, that containing Morgan being ahead of the line, the almost noiseless dip of the paddle urging them slowly along through the thick darkness.

Every now and then they had to bear toward the shore, for the undertow was carrying them out of sound of the surf.

At last they began to hear the noise of voices on shore, and the cry of "*Sentinella alerta!*" from the distant right announced that they were coming to the walls of New Panama once more.

Then Morgan sat up in the stern-sheets for the first time, and uttered a low signal. His own canoe remained stationary, and the others glided up alongside on either hand, turning their bows inward so as to form a star around the central canoe.

"Now, men," said the leader, in a low tone, "I will tell you what lies before you, and you shall say if you will dare to follow Morgan."

"We'll do that to Hades' mouth, admiral," whispered a voice, in another canoe.

"That's my brave Coxon," said Morgan. "I selected you, men, from all my old comrades, because I had watched you in many a fight. I would rather command fifty devils like you than a thousand Spaniards. Now listen: this is our last cruise. Each of you has a bag of pieces of eight nigh your own weight already, on board the periagua. I am going to take you to-night where you can get twice as much more, and if you don't like to go home and live in peace on that, you must find another captain. Will you come and take the prize?"

"Ay, ay, we will."

A deep murmur rolled over the water, and Morgan continued:

"The treasure lies in a sixty-gun frigate, with four hundred Spaniards aboard. How like ye that? Will ye go still?"

"Ay, ay." The murmur was more emphatic than ever.

"Then listen. A thousand pieces to the first man on board, a thousand for any limb lost, ten thousand for your widows if you're killed. Are you all agreed on the price?"

"Ay, ay; lead us on."

"Stop," said the leader, firmly. "My own share must be a half of all, and every woman found aboard. Will you agree to that?"

There was a silence of several minutes, till Coxon inquired:

"Will there be enough left to pay us?"

"To each man I guarantee ten thousand pieces of eight," said Morgan. "But half, and the women, I must have. Is it agreed?"

There was a short whispered discussion, when Coxon spoke.

"It is, admiral, all but the women. The men say you can have two, but no more."

"Two be it, then. I agree," said the leader.

"Now swear the buccaneer's oath, and forward."

In a low voice, but very distinctly and in unison, the buccaneers repeated their oath of fidelity to their own wild laws:

"By fire and flood, by blade and blood,
By hopes of life, by fear of God,
Through deadly strife, we swear to keep
The laws we swore on deck of ship.
To the chief, till death obey,
To a comrade, help away,
To the Spaniard, naught but death,
While we draw a living breath;
And we swear, we swear, on a Spanish deck
The foot once set shall never give back,
Till victory gives the prize,
Or the last among us dies."

"Forward, then!"

The canoes glided through the fog in grim silence.

CHAPTER XXI.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

THE cabin of the Trinidad was gorgeous beyond any thing known in our days. Originally a treasure-ship, since she had been captured by the treacherous Spaniard, the wealth of every prize had been added to her splendors, till the cabin blazed with gold. Every visible bulkhead was covered with carving, and costly velvets and tapestry covered the seats and couches.

In the center of this cabin, before a splendid table inlaid with mosaic, the prize from a Genoese carrack, sat Don Luis Mendoza, while friend Abram was unfolding a huge parchment before him.

Patient Matias, with a stolid look of apathy on his black face, stood guard over four little white bags in another part of the cabin, and by the door was a dark-faced page with long black hair, whose dress was surprisingly rich and fantastic even for the days of brave apparel.

Dona Inez was not to be seen. She was in a state-room near by, and anxiously awaiting—she knew not what.

"What is that paper you have there, Abram?" asked Don Luis.

"The deed which your lordship promised to sign for me. Indeed, my lord, you have taken advantage of the poor old man, and driven a terribly hard bargain with me; but the Jew is honest. What he has said he will keep to; and I have brought the sum for your lordship's use, in good gold."

"I am glad to hear it," said Mendoza, rubbing his hands. "Let us see the deed, Abram. I have one already prepared."

The Jew smiled a crafty smile.

"Strange that both of us should have thought of the same thing. But I should prefer your lordship to sign my deed. It was drawn by the best notary in Panama, and contains all the provisions usual in such cases."

"I prefer to sign my own," said Don Luis, quietly. "My own notary drew it. Look at it."

He threw a folded paper across the table to the Jew, and proceeded to roll a cigarette, watching the other furtively.

Old Abram took the paper, and began to tremble with excitement. He knew well that the bargain was not over yet, and began to feel a vague sense of uneasiness. After all, Don Luis on shore in Abram's palace, and Don Luis in the cabin of his own frigate, were two different people.

The Hidalgo wore an expression of furtively insolent triumph that frightened the Jew.

He looked at the deed submitted by the other, and found that it was a transfer of all his rights and interests in his wife's property; but the wife herself was not associated in it.

"I can not accept this deed, senor," he said, firmly. "Dona Inez herself must sign, as in my own deed."

"I can not trouble Dona Inez with such details," said the captain, scornfully. "Do you think that a Castilian lady is meant to chaffer with a cheating old Jew peddler? You buy the property now at a tenth of its value, and what more can you ask? I sell you my rights. My wife can take care of her own."

"Then I suppose I must see the lady," said the Jew, resignedly. "It is a cruel sacrifice to require of me, senor."

"Who requires it? Not I. Take your deed, and give me my money."

"I shall leave your lordship instead," said Abram, rising. "I know my money, but I do not know my title. Matias, take the bags to the boat. I shall go ashore."

"Stop a moment," and the Hidalgo rose and stepped between him and the door. "You'll keep your bargain and pay the money, or you'll go overboard to feed the sharks. Is that plain, Abram?"

The old Jew for one moment straightened, quivering with rage, for he was no coward. The next minute a thought seemed to strike him, and he calmed down.

"I will take the deed," he said. "Is it signed?"

Don Luis became pleasant at once.

"Ay, ay, I wouldn't cheat you, old man, but you should have stipulated for my wife's signature ashore. What you get, you get. The rest is hers. Take the deed."

Abram secured the deed in his pocket, and beckoned to Matias to lay the bags on the table.

"Will your lordship please to count the gold?" he said.

"Let the slave do it," said Mendoza, carelessly. "You wouldn't dare to bring a short weight here."

The old Jew's eyes glittered strangely.

"I suppose your lordship will not sail till to-morrow. The mist is so thick to-night that no man can penetrate it."

"Of course not," said Mendoza.

"Count the gold, Matias," said Abram, and he turned away toward the door, saying to himself: "And to-morrow I'll have the information laid that will prevent your ever sailing hence."

For Abram had not been idle all day, and had found out from the men of Trinidad, who were drinking ashore, certain facts in the history of that vessel, which he had resolved to use for revenge.

Matias, in his dull, monotonous fashion, began telling out the pieces on the table—"uno, dos, tre, quatro, cinque, seis, sette, otto, nove, diez," and such is the influence of chinking gold on human senses, that insensibly Don Luis found himself watching the slow operation with interest, and checking the count.

Old Abram meanwhile had been attracted by the glittering figure of the beautiful page, whom he now noticed for the first time.

The lad was very dark, and his costume was composed entirely of cloth of gold, while every button of his doublet was a cluster of brilliants. But the sharp eyes of the old Jew were especially riveted on his face, and as he looked, he trembled violently.

He said nothing, but a leaden paleness spread over his features, for he realized that he had been duped at last. Before him stood the living image of Dona Inez, the dead Governor's daughter, and the keen-witted Jew, who knew the secret history of every Panama family, realized that this must be the missing heiress about whom he had heard such rumors from the soldiery. Blas Ortiz had spread the tale of the false Witch of Darien, and Abram had heard it, half-believing it. Here, before his eyes was the truth.

While he was revolving in his mind fresh schemes to outwit this new combination and save his darling money, he heard a slight clink at one of the stern windows of the galleon. It was so light that Don Luis did not notice it, absorbed as he was in watching the counting of the gold.

The disguised page heard it, too, and for the first time started and looked eagerly toward the stern. Abram's eyes followed his, and beheld a strange sight.

The stern-ports of the frigate were large and lofty, and four richly-chased guns occupied the afterpart of the cabin. By each of these guns stood an armed man, who must have climbed in from the outside; and a fifth man, short and spare in flesh, with very broad shoulders and a square dark face, was in the act of stepping out from between the guns.

The man was in half armor and magnificently dressed. His belt was full of pistols, and he wore a long sword which he seemed to disdain to draw. How such a party had effected its entrance so quietly was a mystery to Abram, but none to the cat-footed buccaneers.

As Abram caught sight of them, the disguised page uttered a cry of delight:

"The white chief. We are saved!"

In the same instant Dona Inez darted from a state-room to Morgan's side; Don Luis turned with a great start, and became white as a sheet. The page flew to Morgan and embraced his knees, sobbing, and the leader uttered the stern command:

"Silence, all, and secure the door."

In a moment four buccaneers had crossed the cabin and stood by the doors, silent and grim, while a number of others poured into the cabin through the stern windows, and filled the apartment, not a word being uttered by a soul, till Morgan said:

"Now by the great God who hears us I swear that if Pepita is unharmed, I will leave the seas forever. Don Luis Mendoza, you are met at

last, and you and I will settle this matter like men. Surrender your ship, for I will have no more bloodshed, if I can help it."

And Don Luis, pale as ashes, stammered out: "I surrender. Spare my life and I will join your band, king of the sea-rovers."

Morgan's lip curled with disdain.

"I would not keep you for a powder-monkey. Men, fire the signal to clear the ship."

CHAPTER XXII.

CUTTING THE CABLE.

At the words of the buccaneer chief the doors that led to the deck were thrown wide open, disclosing the crew of the Trinidad, gathered in knots, most of them half drunk. One of the buccaneers fired a pistol into the crowd, and in a moment a scene of the wildest confusion arose. Buccaneers poured in through the open ports, and the cracking of pistols was followed by the charging yell of the desperate rovers. They were all selected from the bravest of Morgan's old comrades. The chief himself rushed out of the cabin at the head of his own body, and dealt such fearful blows with his razor-like cut-lasse, that the cowardly ruffians fled before him in terror.

The buccaneers were down below, throwing hand-grenades, and driving the men between decks up to the air; and others were above, cutting them down as they made their appearance.

Then first one and then another began to drop out of the ports, and swim to shore, and within ten minutes every Spaniard, but Don Luis, and the dead and wounded, had vacated the Trinidad, and was seeking safety in the water.

And then was exhibited the iron discipline of the buccaneers, the great secret of their success.

Some flew to the rigging, ascended the yards and cast loose the sails, while others manned sheets and braces in desperate haste. Morgan sprang to the summit of the after castle, and thundered his orders over the ship.

Then came a flash through the fog toward the shore, and the boom of a gun was followed by the humming of a round shot overhead.

Morgan laughed scornfully and muttered:

"Fire from every gun. 'Tis all guess-work."

As if to answer his words, a great shouting was heard from the shore, and a succession of flashes along the sea-wall announced that the garrison was alarmed, and determined to sink the Trinidad if they could.

During the daytime every gun had been trained on or about the frigate, which lay full under their broadside, and spite of the fog, the missiles came surprisingly near. The only thing which saved the Trinidad was the circumstance of her having swung out of line with the tide, so as to keep her out of the direct fire.

While the cannonade continued increasing in fierceness, the reckless buccaneers laughed and joked as they manned the ropes, and before long one of them came to report that the ship was ready to start all but tripping the anchor.

Then Morgan held up his hand, and felt a faint breeze, about enough to fill the sails.

"Cut the cable," he said, briefly. "I take the helm myself to-night."

The next moment the heavy blows of an ax were heard, and the cannonade from the shore grew louder than before.

Suddenly there was a sound of parting ropes, and the frigate, hitherto straining at her anchor, glided smoothly away with an easy motion that told that she was free, and yielding to her helm, swept round seaward through the mist, guided by the brilliant flashes of the guns on shore as she stood out to sea.

It was a dangerous experiment in such a channel, and amid such a fog, but the latter was rapidly clearing away owing to the tremulous motion given to the air by the hot cannonade. First it thinned, then it began to lift, and finally it swept entirely away as a brisk breeze from the north came rushing down from the mountains, curling the bay into little waves, and revealing the Trinidad bending over to the breeze with all sail set. Every instant increased the distance, and in half an hour the Trinidad was out of gunshot. The buccaneer chief, relinquished the helm, and went down into the cabin.

The sisters were seated together on a couch, exchanging the confidences of twenty years' separation, and Don Luis was moodily watching them, guarded by the grim-looking buccaneer with his pistol.

Friend Abram and Matias were waiting patiently near by, both of them hopeful of release. Into this group Morgan broke with the words, "Don Luis Mendoza, prepare to die."

Instantly the haughty cavalier sunk on his knees, ashy pale with fear, and began to falter out prayers for life. Morgan cut him short.

"Dog, you have cost me too long a chase; but I'll give you one chance for your life. Will you fight me here and now?"

"What have I done?" cried Mendoza in agony.

"I swear that Pepita is as pure as when—"

"Dog, I know it," said the buccaneer, with cutting scorn. "Think you I would offer you the rights of a gentleman else? You kept her to cheat yonder Jew, so that when he had paid you for your right, you could produce her at the last moment and claim the half of the property in hers. But, senor, you know not something. Don Alonzo del Campo y Espinosa made a will, and under that will I am Pepita's guardian. I heard your bargain with yonder Jew, and he is the man that shall right Pepita and give her back her fortune."

Friend Abram started, alarmed at a certain meaning in the buccaneer's tone, exclaiming:

"Holy father Jacob, senior bucaniero, how can I do it? I am but a very poor man."

"I will settle with you afterward," said Morgan, icily. "You escaped my men last year. I will see that you disgorge now. Don Luis, will you come on deck? You have insulted and ill-treated my promised wife, Dona Pepita del Campo y Espinosa. I offer you the death of a gentleman. Will you come?"

But Don Luis made no answer, only trembling.

Then the freebooter stepped up to him, and struck him, with a backhanded blow, across the face, starting the blood.

Don Luis started up, drew his sword, and rushed out on deck.

Morgan was about to follow, when Dona Inez flung herself on her knees before him.

"Morganos, do not you slay him. Remember, I am his wife."

"Ay, but Pepita is mine. Girl, you are too late. You should have thought of that before you married him."

"Morganos, one word. You loved me once. For that love, spare him."

"For that love I will do this, Inez. I will drive him overboard. If he can swim, good. If not, God have mercy on him."

And he rushed out on deck into the night.

Pepita stopped her sister from following.

"Not to save him, sister. My honor was safe only through his fears, and I were less than a dog could I forgive what he has made me suffer."

And the disguised page threw back her black hair, and stood at the cabin door, somber and pitiless, to see her wrongs avenged.

Morgan and Mendoza, both stripped to the waist, stood amid a ring of buccaneers, who gathered round with stern impartiality to see the singular duel.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE END OF ALL.

DEEP down in the bosom of the waters, on the track the Trinidad was steering, lay a reef of rocks twenty feet from the surface, a marine mountain, with a rugged, craggy head.

Sprawled far out over this reef, like a gigantic spider, lay the ghastly hideous form of the sea-cat, for the few men it had swallowed were but a whet to its monstrous appetite.

In size it was even huger than the well-remembered creature that attacked the Asuncion off St. Lucia years before. Its mighty arms were some fifty feet in length, and as thick at the base as the body of a man, tapering away to whiplike extremities.*

So the sea-cat waited for its prey, patient and ever watchful. Anon the lately quiescent mass began to exhibit signs of life, as if instinct warned it of the coming of the ship.

The great green eyes were turned, with a hungry glare, toward the land, and the body swelled out to three times its former dimensions, while the arms loosened their hold on the rock, and the whole creature rose up in the water toward the surface.

Presently the splashing of waves against the bows of a ship became audible, and the great frigate Trinidad bore down on the monster with all sail set.

On her decks in the waist were Morgan and Mendoza, and as they neared the sea-cat they approached each other with drawn swords.

* The sperm whale, as is well known to sailors and naturalists, makes the cuttle-fish, of all sizes, including the sea-cat, a principal article of food. Pieces of the arms of the latter have been found in the stomach of the cachalot, which, judging from proportionate thickness, must have come from limbs measuring twenty, forty, sixty, and, in one instance, seventy-four feet in length. It is a fortunate thing for humanity that the larger specimens of this monster keep at the bottom of the sea for the most part. Were food to fail them there, compelling them to rise to the surface, the sea would be far more dangerous than it is.

The instant the swords clashed every one drew aside, leaving an open passage to the ports.

Then Morgan, without a word, set his teeth, and lunged like a steam-engine at Don Luis, when, all of a sudden, a long white snake seemed to dart in at the open port, and caught the unhappy man about the middle.

"The sea-cat! The sea-cat!"

In a twinkling the buccaneers had sprung for axes, and attacked the monster as a second arm writhed in over the bulwarks.

In a moment the massive arm over the bulwarks was divided, and the sole remaining one was that wrapped around Don Luis. Then the poor wretch clung frantically to a gun-carriage, shrieking wildly for help, while the loathsome coils clung tighter and tighter, until, with a despairing yell, he loosed his hold and was snatched through the port into the darksome sea without, to the ravenous maw of the sea-cat.

The men rushed to the side as the vessel swept on, and saw a writhing arm uplifted amid the white wake of the frigate, holding a yelling, struggling human figure. Then the arm curved inward to the sea, and all was still, as the sea-cat sunk to the bottom with its victim.

It needs but little to tell what followed.

The once-pitiless and always royally-reckless buccaneer left the seas after his last capture. Before he left the coast of Panama, he compelled friend Abram to disgorge enough of his ill-gotten wealth to pay a fair price for the inheritance of the children of Espinosa and Matias was the messenger for the bags of gold that were the purchase-money of half Panama. As for the money-lender himself, he had heard too much of buccaneer tortures to stand out for terms. He received a good deed from Espinosa's heirs, and paid a fair price for the first time in his life, getting off safe with his skin.

Then the Trinidad sailed away, and Morgan, the buccaneer, disappeared from the scene of his victories, and troubled the Spaniards no more. He reached England in safety, married Pepita, was knighted by the king, and acquired a splendid estate in Wales, his native country.

Inez remained a widow only two years, and married an English baronet, Sir Miles Walsham. Her posterity exists to the present day. The union of Pepita and Morgan was blessed with but one child, a daughter, who married her first cousin, John Walsham, and enriched that family with her vast wealth.

And the hand that traces these lines, belongs to one whose family, at the present day, are not ashamed to trace back part of their lineage to the king of the buccaneers; for they come in a direct line from Morgan and Pepita, the Indian queen, the disguised Witch of Darien, saved from her last enemy by the terrible SEA-CAT.

THE END.

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